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This narrative project explored the educational experiences and academic identity of sixteen African American students as they traveled through the socially constructed context of schooling. I examined how these African American students construct meaning from experiences in regards to identity development within the context of school. Review of existing research regarding African American students and achievement is numerous; nevertheless, still missing from this vast body of these studies is the "voice" of the African American student as it specifically relates to their schooling experiences, achievement, and identity development.

I grounded my approach to inquiry and research design within the narrative framework. This method of inquiry was designed because of its appropriateness in intertwining personal, lived experiences as an African American student with the theoretical and/or social constructs of academic identity and achievement that could not be investigated adequately in any other research form. These narratives are a collection of experiences that allow the participants to disclose not only themselves as individuals in the context of "I" but also regarding themselves in the context of "we."

Six themes emerged from the data that was collected from the participants: 1) the significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity; 2) the function of school diversity in developing academic identity; 3) the nurturing role of teachers influencing academic identity; 4) the development of a positive conceptual framework regarding the

meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity; 5) plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity; and 6) the influential role of supportive parents and family in the development of academic identity. The narratives from these participants support the need for positive educational experiences and healthy academic identities as essential when trying to enhance full, optimal development of our young African American students within the context of school. The knowledge and skills gained during this developmental stage is critical in that it empowers African American youth as democratic citizens. Empowerment enhances participation within democratic structures while improving beneficial opportunities through its functions.

“I DON’T THINK ABOUT BEING A BLACK STUDENT AND GOING THROUGH
SCHOOL:” AN EXPLORATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC
IDENTITY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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To my parents, Billy and Georgia Seagraves,
for instilling the value of hard work
and providing the inspiration to follow my dreams.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses*

Personal Reflection

It appears odd that the words of a 19th Century British poet would find its way into an educational leadership dissertation. Nonetheless, this short yet profound stanza written by Alfred, Lord Tennyson nearly two hundred years ago has been a source of guidance during the construction and deconstruction of my identity and ultimately my “self.” Over the past several years as a graduate student these words have not only been a welcome sight, but also a point of contingency.

These words are a stark reminder that we are sums of our experiences. We become what we experience and experience what we become. Unfortunately, most of what we encounter occurs within a socially confined context of a hegemonic society. In essence, we are constructed beings with controlled ideas, identities, and integrity within a society that supports cultural, racial, and gender dominance.

I remember as young child walking out into the elementary school parking lot with my mother as we departed a not so pleasant parent-teacher conference. I can still recall my mother’s disappointment in her voice, “Son you’re going to have to do better in

school. Just pay attention and write a little neater for the teacher.” A few years later it was a similar scene as I was preparing what I thought would be a promotion from the fourth grade. I remember sitting in the guidance counselor’s office with my mother in one chair to my right and father in another chair to my left. I remember the collective voice of everyone in attendance that day and the frustration that resonated with their words, “Mark, you’re just not ready to move forward.” I was held back and repeated the fourth grade.

As I entered the eighth grade the scenery was slightly different but the experiences were much of the same. It was both stressful and disappointing. I vividly recall being promoted into the Academically Gifted (AG) group. Even as a young adolescent I was intelligent enough to realize what had happened, my academic *track* had changed. I remember the first day of school in my new *track*. There were new classes, new teachers, and what I thought would be new friends. I remember the harsh-stares and the quiet whispers as I walked into the English classroom full of gifted students. They never accepted me and I despised the change. Ultimately, I purposely performed below my ability early on during that school year so that they would change my schedule and remove me from the AG track.

Later on in high school I can’t call to mind ever being pushed to reach my potential nor was I ever encouraged when things went well for me in school. I have never forgotten the career inventory assessment that I took which informed me that I would be best suited for an occupation in custodial services. It appeared that college was not an option and I certainly wasn’t steered in that direction by the school. These are the

experiences I remember or the “part of all that I have met” that Tennyson speaks about in his poem *Ulysses*. It has become the “untravell'd world” whose margin tended to never fade.

As a white male I can't possibly fathom the experiences of African American students in public school systems today across America or what it is like as a child of color within public school systems dominated by Eurocentric values. Nonetheless, I certainly understand the importance of an experience and the vital role the experience plays in the construction and deconstruction of our identities.

Ultimately, this quest for a greater understanding about my experiences as well as the experiences of others has prompted a revolution within my mental consciousness. The result of this war that has been waged is a better awareness for the need of critical reflection regarding race. It is an outcome that has allowed for the construction of a new critical *lens* in which I view the conflicting and contradicting nature of my personal identity manufactured by American society-one guided by the precepts of democracy with a tendency toward racism. In the words of American author and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson spoken in his 1837 address, *The American Scholar*, to the Phi Beta Kappa Society, “So shall we come to look at the world with new eyes. It shall answer the endless inquiry of the intellect, What is truth?...What is good?”

Setting the Context

In Patrick Slattery's (1995) book *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*, the author encourages his readers to become active participants rather than stagnated observers in an epic journey to find meaning. One segment of his postmodern excursion

explores how the issue of race is splintering the identity of American society. In addition to understanding the fragmentation of American identities, his journey also includes an admonition to realize and embrace how these identities are interrelated. He states the following:

Historically, European Americans and African Americans are two sides of the same cultural coin, two interrelated narratives in the American story, two interrelated elements of the American identity...Because *white* does not exist apart from *black* the two coexist and intermingle, and the repression of this knowledge deforms us all. (p.138)

Ultimately, from a postmodern perspective, understanding this strange dichotomy regarding *black* and *white* narratives of American society is an integral part in the development of our ideas, identities, and integrity.

Nearly one hundred years before Slattery's words regarding the interrelated narratives of the American identity, sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois (1903/1986a) expressed similar thoughts and concerns in his epic writing *The Souls of Black Folk*. From a sociological perspective, DuBois vividly explores the coexistence of blackness and whiteness as he attempts to "show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (p. 359). He became very concerned with the meaning of *blackness* within the context of *whiteness*. Something he felt created a "double consciousness" or a "two-ness" in African Americans (p. 364). DuBois believed that blacks were "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 364-365).

In the end, Patrick Slattery's (1995) postmodern dialogue along with W.E.B DuBois' (1903/1986a) autobiographical essays that explore racial identity have piqued my interest in understanding the intermingling narratives of American society. It has been my experience that exploring these blended narratives will often lead to reflective conversations regarding identity. Du Bois (1903/1986a) emphasized that these reflective conversations seek to answer one important question: "To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem?" (p.363)

An example of this dialogue occurred during an impromptu conversation with a female African American colleague with whom I inquired how race shaped her life and ultimately her identity. Her short, sermon-like response still resonates with me today. Although I was naively exploring one side of the cultural coin, she quickly reminded me of the flip side. We are socially constructed human beings with racial identities. In essence, every experience is a racial experience because "*white* is a fabrication made possible by the construction of the concept *black*" (Slattery, 1995, p. 138). I keenly become aware that black identity development can not be fully understood without knowledge of white identity development and the other way around.

Her response prompted me to critically reflect and explore how race shaped my life and personal identity. In a matter of seconds I realized that it hadn't shaped my life. I quickly learned that this is the socially constructed norm for white males who have been indoctrinated by a modern philosophical paradigm. In short, I was searching for *postmodern* answers to my question while aimlessly existing in a *modern* world.

Metaphorically speaking, I had become a prisoner searching for identity and cultural emancipation. This search for freedom led me to the hermeneutic process of discovery and provided the inspiration needed to move forward in this phase of my life. As scholar and curriculum theorist James B. Macdonald (1988) wrote, “The fundamental human quest is the search for meaning. . . This is the search (research) for greater understanding that motivates and satisfies us” (p. 105).

So as I continue this search for meaning and ultimately satisfaction between the coexistence of *black* and *white*, between the interwoven narratives that construct American identity I realize that at the center of this exploration is a greater understanding of the *self* along with the knowledge that has repressed the *self*. Nonetheless, in keeping alive the spirit of James B. Macdonald’s legacy regarding research, it is my desire that this dissertation exploring the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students “has the potential for redemptive consequences and a cosmological vision of hope, justice, and compassion” (cited in Slattery, 1995, p. xix).

Therefore, in this dissertation I present the narratives of sixteen African American high school students and their discussion regarding experiences and identity within the context of school. Despite a variety of elementary and middle school experiences, these students, eight females and eight males, all currently attend a diverse rural high school located in the Southeast. I examine the educational experiences of these students and explore the development of identity within the context of the school environment.

Why I Chose This Study

Our culture views schools as micro-societies, in that society is a function of education, and education is a function of society (Joseph, Bravmann, Windschitl, Mikel, & Green, 2000). As our society becomes increasingly stratified, so do our public school institutions. It is a revolving phenomenon that endangers the founding principles of democracy and social justice. I chose to study the narrative experiences of African American high school students because the need for a “cosmological vision of hope, justice, and compassion” that Macdonald spoke about mirrors my ethical and moral paradigm as both a person and professional (cited in Slattery, 1995, p. xix). This paradigm has evolved over the years because as a veteran educator, not only have I been confronted with moral dilemmas, but I also have led students in understanding civility and participation in democracy. Macdonald’s philosophy has obviously shaped the focus of my moral and ethical paradigm toward democracy, social justice, power, and a concern for others. In the end, I believe that exploring the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students is not only beneficial for blacks, but for society at large.

When I speak of democracy, social justice, power, and a concern for others I feel compelled to reference Martin Luther King, Jr. (2001/1963, *I Have A Dream*, ¶ 2), who as one of the greatest orators of the twentieth century, spoke at the base of the Washington Monument on August 28, 1963. His message inquired about a “great beacon of light” and defined a “hope to millions” who have been captive to “the flames of withering injustice.” Nevertheless, his thick, rich description also depicted a nation

suffering from schizophrenia, or a split personality. The United States professed democracy and the “unalienable rights of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” to all men (King 2001/1963, I Have A Dream, ¶ 4). It pledged to be a great united nation, a nation better than other tyrannical governments around the world, yet it stood divided with issues of democracy and social justice.

On that day in history Martin Luther King Jr. was speaking about the guarantee of democracy established by our government and written by our founding fathers centuries ago in the Declaration of Independence. However, over time it has allowed only some to become heirs and receive that great promise of democracy and social justice. I first heard this speech as a young, growing adolescent. Since then I’ve always been inspired by the words of Martin Luther King Jr. (2001/1963, I Have A Dream, ¶ 13) “that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’” Similar to the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. (2001/1963, I Have A Dream, ¶ 7), it is my hope that “a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.”

It may appear that a reference here to Martin Luther King, Jr. by a white male author is trite and outright pandering to an African American audience, or the beginning of what Susan Stanford Friedman characterizes as a “narrative of guilt” (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997, p. xii). However, it is simply my wish to shed light on issues of democracy and social justice within the context of education. Despite an honest attempt to explore and advance upon these issues within an educational context research from the

previous two decades still confirms our belief that schools “serve to sort children along social class, race, and gender lines, contributing to massive inequalities in educational, and, later occupational outcomes” (Weis et al., 1997, Preface).

A primary example of this is illustrated by the *A Nation at Risk Report* in 1983. Since this report, the United States Department of Education has been more than preoccupied with public school reform. The eighteen member committee, dubbed the National Commission of Excellence in Education, summarized their report by stating “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, *A Nation at Risk* Section, ¶ 1). This report spawned a frenzy of public school reforms geared toward improving the current state of our American education system with a focus on student achievement. In retrospect, many educators believe this to be the beginning of systemic reform efforts which spotlight accountability as the focal point for improvement. Over the past decade the crux of this accountability reform movement has accentuated the complex issues associated with the experiences, development, and achievement of African American students.

Purpose of this Study

In general, the purpose of this study is to add both to the body of existing literature and to the cultural framework of meaning regarding educational experience, academic identity, and achievement of African American students. Review of existing research regarding blacks and achievement is plentiful; nevertheless, missing from this vast body of these studies is the voice of the African American student as it specifically

relates to his or her schooling experiences and achievement. Cultural values and norms of Eurocentric dominated public schools are often culturally incongruent with values of African American students. This narrowed perspective on education creates a greater cultural divide between black students and school (Delpit, 1993; 1995). When these cultural values are either ignored or misunderstood, our public school institutions are in direct opposition to the democratic ideals and social justice philosophy adopted by this country's privileged white males.

More specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the educational experiences of African American students and to explore the development of identity within the context of the school. As stated by Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) "Personal stories are not nearly a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are a means by which identities may be fashioned" (p.1). Therefore, this research is not trying to reveal the truth based on empirical evidence, but rather to present personal and social identities based on constructed realities. These personal narratives are analyzed to develop a greater insight into the educational experiences of African American students.

Description of the Problem

Over the past decade, there have been hundreds of educational conferences each year where legislative and public school administrative leaders in conjunction with various community organizations and school stakeholders have assembled to discuss educational matters. The content and conversation of these symposia have focused around issues regarding achievement; consequently these symposia have focused on the achievement of African American students. Throughout classrooms across America,

white students continue to do better than students of color in numerous standardized measurements of scholastic aptitude (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

This phenomenon is known throughout the field of education as the “achievement gap” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2000). Therefore, the achievement of African American students is one of the most important concerns for the American educational system in the new millennium (Roach, 2004). Although, the achievement gap may be considered unfair to some scholars and educators, the achievement of African Americans is of major concern to most policy-makers, in general because of its profound impact on the future development of local economies and global economics. As Dr. Ronald Ferguson, a Harvard University professor has stated, “It is in everybody’s best interest to raise the academic achievement of Black and Brown kids” (cited in Roach, 2004, p. 23).

As cited in Thernstrom and Therstrom (2003) statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress reveal that nearly half of African American students are not performing at grade level and most are nearly four years behind white counterparts. These authors propose that education has become an economic and social equalizer. Furthermore, they suggest that more than ever before in the history of America, equal knowledge ensures equal pay, equal pay better assures equal citizenship. There thoughts are very important to remember because improving the achievement of African American students will challenge the conventional curricula that guide today’s teaching and learning practices. This curriculum is developed based upon the principles of a *sound basic education* and lends itself to reproduce poverty and privilege within our

society. As a result, sorting and selecting processes emerges within our schools to create a stratified society that jeopardizes our nation's founding principles of democracy and understanding of social justice.

Fordham (1996) and Ogbu (1990) have hypothesized that understanding and improving the achievement of African American students is very difficult. It requires the weaving together of multiple identities such as cultural, social, and ethnic within the context of academic achievement. This belief by Fordham and Ogbu creates a conceptual framework that intertwines previously developed stratified layers of personal integrity and merges them into one constructed theory regarding identity. Howard (2003) indicates that this identity described by Fordom (1996) and Ogbu (1990) is a very important concept to explore. He agrees with Fordham's and Ogbu's portraits of African American identity within the context of school and coins the term *academic identity* to describe this complex phenomenon.

From this perspective, academic identity is directly related to who African American students perceive themselves to be within an educational environment. It explores how they will develop strategies for managing negative stereotypes from mainstream society and how they make decisions regarding academic rigor and school success that ultimately affects their future (Fordham, 1996; Howard, 2003; Ogbu, 1990).

As a result, understanding the educational experience, academic identity, and achievement of African American students has become an issue of social justice as African American students have historically been misidentified as low performing, at-risk, and an endangerment to the learning environment within the context of schooling

(Gehlbach, 1966; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Persell, 1981). This misidentifying and mislabeling has led to further complications beyond the educational environment and, as a result, adult African Americans have been generalized as unemployed, lazy, or poor (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

There have been numerous pieces of literature which have sought to investigate the education and achievement of African American students (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1996; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ogbu, 1990; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Woodson, 1933/1990). Notably absent from this research is the voice of the African American student. Most of these studies include the voice of policy-makers, lecturers, and activists, but few include the perception of the African American students as it specifically relates to this important subject matter. These studies have focused on instructional practices, culturally relevant pedagogy, and displayed various quantitative measures of examining the achievement of African American students. Howard (2003) indicates the voice of the African American child is very significant because it can “provide valuable insight into a marginalized population and tender insight into correcting persistent school failure” (p. 4). Although, I acknowledge persistent school failure is not indicative of all black students, it is a popular stereotype created by the mass media that uses culturally irrelevant standardized tests as factual evidence to support its claims.

Why I Use Narratives

I chose to explore personal narratives because of the gap presented by existing literature. As Howard (2003) recommends, there is a critical “need for an insider’s level

of school analysis” (p. 5) regarding the achievement and experiences of black students. This method of inquiry was designed because of its appropriateness in intertwining personal, lived experiences as an African American student with the theoretical and/or social constructs of academic identity and achievement that could not be investigated adequately in any other research form. These narratives are a collection of experiences that allow the participants to disclose not only themselves as individuals in the context of “I” but also regarding themselves in the context of “we.” As described by Casey (1995-96) this concept has been illustrate by various researchers as the “collective subjective”, “interpretive community”, or “social dialect” (p. 222-223). In essence, the *identity* of the individual becomes the voice of a larger political, social, or cultural group.

Narrative analysis reveals patterns and perspectives through intertextuality and the exploration of silences, slippages, and selectivities. This mode of narrative analysis preserves the sequence and structure of the original text while simultaneously disclosing the lens of the researcher (Casey, 1995-96; Reismann, 1993). The “patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity” are spoken by the narrators (Casey, 1995-96, p. 234). As the Popular Memory Group (1982) attests each narrative is a representation of reality to those who author the story. Narrative research respects the integrity of the storyteller while making visible the cultural lens of the researcher. Briefly stated it is an analysis of relationships. “What is most important is neither the “objective” (structure) nor the “subjective” (culture), but the relationship between them. . . (Casey, 1993, p. 12). It is a qualitative inquiry that applies a naturalistic approach to analyzing experiences. It is my belief that delving into to the school educational experience and academic identity of

African American students' through a *narrative lens* will improve not only the teaching and learning practices of African American students, but may also draw attention to larger issues in society concerning democracy and social justice.

Research Questions

Scholarly literature was the primary determinant that guided the research questions addressed by this dissertation. This work is intended to contribute to the existing literature regarding identity development while providing a greater understanding for a cultural framework of meaning into the educational experience of African American students. The educational experience of black students has been characterized as the new “national crisis” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The principal research questions that guide the analysis process are:

1. How do African American students at a small rural high school describe their schooling experience?
2. How do African American students in a small rural high school view their academic ability, potential, and performance?
3. Who and/or what has had the greatest influence in the formation of the academic identity of African American students who attend Horace Mann High School?
4. What is the relationship between academic identity, educational experiences, and/or achievement of these African American students?

Definition of Terms

Educational Experience—Any experience within the context of school. It includes any activity that requires physical, social, or cognitive engagement.

Self—A philosophical description of the various psychological agents within oneself, these agents are accountable for the behaviors, ideas, and interests that construct and define our identity (Erikson, 1968; Goffman, 1959).

Identity—A philosophical term from the Postmodern Era used to describe the global “self.” Identity and “self” are often used as interchangeable terms from the Postmodern perspective. Both terms refer to the various psychological agents that are responsible for ones actions, ideas, and interests that define our “self” (Slattery, 1995). Examples of these various psychological agents of identity include but are not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, physical, emotional, and academic (Branch, 1999; Fine, Powell, Weis, & Wong, 1997; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; House, 2000; Howard, 2003; Marsh, 1990; Mitchell, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Thompson & Tyagi, 1996),

Academic Identity—One agent of the multidimensional psychological self that is strongly connected to academic achievement. It is the internalization of an individual’s belief regarding academic ability, potential, and performance in the midst of the socially constructed external environment of public school practices, values and beliefs, which support certain patterns of appropriate conduct within the schooling environment based on larger societal issues (House, 2000; Howard, 2003; Marsh, 1990; Mitchell, 2005).

Race—A social construction of differences and divisions between humans that is consistently used as an indicator in the unequal treatment of others (Gause, 2001).

Narrative—A socially constructed story regarding past experiences that is embedded with assumptions and interpretations by the narrator of the story (Casey 1995-96).

Black v. African American—In this dissertation the terms “Black” and “African American” will be used synonymously. I recognize there is some controversy in identifying persons of African descent based on the history or politics of our Nation. In either case these terms are used to describe a group of individuals who do not consider themselves white, Latino, Native American, or Asian American who account for nearly 13% of the United States population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006).

Organization of the Study

I begin Chapter I of this dissertation that examines the development of academic identity in African American students with a personal reflection. I firmly believe that before I can understand the narratives of “others” I must first accept, embrace, and ultimately authenticate the narrative of “myself.” Levinson (1978) offers us a stark reminder about the importance of this type of acceptance:

If these choices are congruent with his dreams, talents, and external possibilities, they provide a basis for a relatively satisfactory life structure. If the choices are poorly made and the new structure seriously flawed, he will pay a heavy price in the next period. (p. 59)

Next, I set the context of this dissertation regarding personal narratives by exploring its value from a post-modern perspective. Then I explain my interest in democracy and social democracy by explaining why I chose this topic. As an educator I have heard the following words of wisdom numerous times, “Education is the soul of society as it passes from one generation to the next” and “America’s future walks through the doors of our schools each day.” If this is true, then in order to improve democracy

and balance the scales of social justice for the future of our nation, we must work hard to develop a better understanding into the narratives of African American students.

Subsequently, I introduce the purpose of this study, expose the problem, and present the rationale for this type of qualitative inquiry. In closing this chapter, I display the research questions that guide this dissertation, define key terms, and organize the remainder of this study.

In Chapter II, I present the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework that guides this study. Although some researchers use the term theoretical orientation and conceptual framework synonymously, I choose to draw a distinction. I describe the theoretical orientation as a general lens of *explanation* based on formal theories constructed by previous researchers. The theoretical framework for this project is situated within the post-modern perspective that includes theories, fields of studies, and intellectual movements associated with this paradigm such as critical race theory, whiteness, and cultural studies.

I describe the conceptual framework as a specific lens of *justification* that is being constructed between previous scholars and the current researcher. The conceptual framework for this study provides a historical perspective of African Americans within the realm of education, investigates the role of cultural deficit theories, examines various aspects of identity development, summarizes the media's contribution to the development of a culture of anti-intellectualism among some black youth, and finally presents the risks associated with stereotyping.

In Chapter III, I provide a rationale for situating the methodology within a qualitative research paradigm. I describe the qualitative research paradigm along with the philosophical assumptions and ideological stances upon which this paradigm is situated. I explain how I use the phenomenological tradition and social constructs of language that lead to the development of a narrative research design. Furthermore, in the chapter I describe my own subjectivity and supply details regarding the research site, selection of participants, data collection and analysis procedures. I end the chapter by discussing the verification process.

The audience is introduced to the participants in Chapter IV. In the chapter I provide the readers with a description of the participants using research notes and direct quotes. I provide the reader with an opportunity to visualize how the participants see themselves.

In Chapter V, I explore the educational experiences and academic identity of sixteen African American students. I incorporate the constant comparative method that includes unitizing, categorizing, and connecting the narratives of these students (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). The result of this process is the formation of six themes that merge together direct quotes, researcher notes and scholarly literature.

In Chapter VI, I continue to analyze the findings from the personal narratives by revisiting the research questions that guide the study, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the research, I present implications for further research, and I conclude the chapter with implications for leading and teaching.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

We confine discussions about race in America to the ‘problems’ black people pose for whites, rather than consider what this way of viewing black people reveals about us as a nation.
(West, 2001, p. 5-6)

If...one managed to change the curriculum in all schools so that [African Americans] learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only [African Americans], you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history.
(Baldwin, 1963, p. 201)

Defining the need for a new perspective. Those are the words of Cornel West that reverberate within as he describes, in the above quote, the persistent flaw of American society to become narrow-minded with critical issues, especially those issues that involve color. In the quote provided at the beginning of this chapter by James Baldwin (1963), we get a glimpse into the description of a new perspective that West desires to see evolve. It is a new perspective that provides liberation, a perspective that affords us the opportunity to reflect on critical issues in the “context of social and historical realities” (Slattery, 1995, p. xii).

This perspective renders a *postmodern* lens to a problem that has historically been viewed through a *modernist* standpoint. Instead of exploring quantitatively the racial

achievement gap between blacks and whites or what some would numerically characterize through standardized measures as the persist underachieving of blacks, the postmodern perspective examines what the alleged underachievement discloses about others, our educational system, and us as individuals.

In Chapter I, I introduced the purpose of this study, expose the problem, and present the rationale for this type of qualitative inquiry. In closing that chapter, I displayed the research questions that guided this dissertation, defined key terms, and organized the remainder of the study.

In this chapter, I situate the lenses, or perspectives, that direct this study. The lenses of which I speak are described within the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework that follows. As warned by Maxwell (2005) the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework is more than a summation of existing research. Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) described these two terms as the systemic approach that reveals the various assumptions, beliefs, and theories of explored research that guide the development and implementation of one's study.

In Chapter III, I will present the rationale for choosing this tradition. I will describe the qualitative paradigm, phenomenological tradition, and narrative research design. Then, I will seek to understand myself as the researcher. I will conclude Chapter III by providing details into the research site, selection of participants, and finally procedures for data collection and analysis.

Theoretical Orientation

A theoretical framework can be described as the “research paradigm(s) within which you situate your work” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 36). It is a very general structure upon which the researcher will link formal theories adopted by a specific field or tradition to the current problem of inquiry. Therefore, it becomes a set of values, beliefs, or assumptions (or a paradigm) that tends to be shared by a group of scholars. It is something that has been previously constructed. Nonetheless, it evolves into a general lens of *explanation* that is based on formal theory and is ultimately disclosed by the author regarding the current research problem and the location of that problem within a body of knowledge.

I have chosen to organize a shared set of values, beliefs, or assumptions related to the current area of inquiry in what I have labeled as the theoretical orientation. This theoretical framework is designed to include theories, fields of studies, and intellectual movements associated with postmodernism such as critical race theory, whiteness, and cultural studies which have already been constructed to explore the current research problem. It is a very general lens of *explanation* situating the experiences of African American students within philosophical assumptions relating to the nature of one’s world and how that world is understood (See Figure 1).

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is understood as an alternative viewpoint to modernism that:

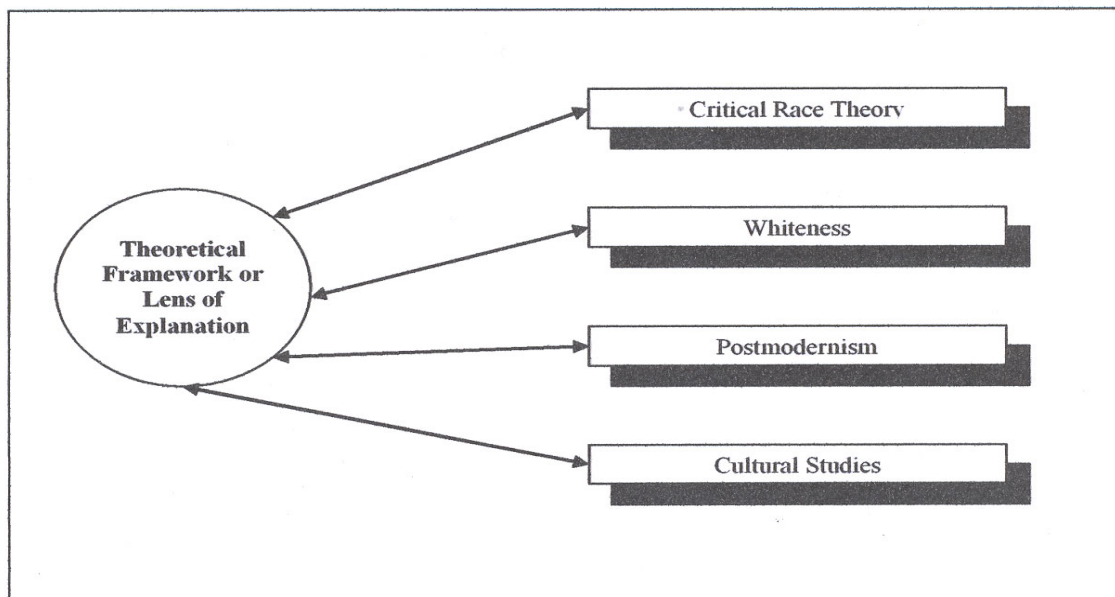
aims at exposing how, in modern, liberal democracies, the construction of political [or personal] identity and the operationalization of basic values take place through the deployment of conceptual binaries such as we/them,

responsible/irresponsible, rational/irrational, legitimate/illegitimate, normal/abnormal, and so on...[P]ostmodernist draw attention to the ways in which the boundary between...[these] terms is socially reproduced and policed. (Lilly, 1998, p. 591)

This perspective of postmodernism views the construction of identity and the internalization of values as being greatly affected by the exercise of power through a ruling party. This social reproduction occurs within a confined context, a context that is controlled by powerful elite individuals who situate themselves within a society that constructs hegemonic social structures. As Giroux (1988) argues, power can be used as a commanding “instrument for the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and the dominant legitimating ideologies of the ruling group” (p. xx.).

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework Concept Map.



Unfortunately, the use of power to breed “capitalist relations” and “legitimizing ideologies” occurs within the public schools located across America. In essence, our schools have adopted what Slattery (1995) characterizes as the schizophrenic nature of the American identity-an identity that fails to embrace the dualisms of American democracy and American racism. Public school institutions have become places where the voices of the marginalized and the oppressed have become increasingly silent (Delpit, 1993). As bell hooks (1989) asserts “What is true is that we make choices, that we choose voices to hear and voices to silence” (p.78).

Schools have definitely made the choice of which voices to hear and which voices to silence. Those decisions have been made based on the ideologies of the dominant social structures that rule our public school institutions. The dominant ideals I speak of that govern our public schools are found in elitism, racism, and conservatism. This becomes cumbersome for African Americans as bell hooks (1989) warns “we [African Americans] must move outside our class of origin, our collective ethnic experience, and enter hierarchical institutions” (p.78). The result is assimilation to and acceptance of hegemonic social structures that suppress the critical consciousness of blacks.

In the end, this suppression of critical consciousness has a devastating effect on the identity development of African American students. From a postmodern perspective, one of the primary functions of school is to assist in the construction of individual identities (Gause, 2001). Therefore, the need for a postmodern lens into the exploration of African American experiences as they travel through their school years is offered by Carlson and Apple (1998):

[C]onceptions of identity formation begin with a common, *nonessentialistic* conception of the self, that is, one that views the self as an historical, cultural, and discursive production that is always in the process of reconstruction. Furthermore, the self is understood to have no meaning apart from the power relations it constitutes and is constituted by, which is to say that the self is *relational* and defined by a web of relationships with “Others.” (p. 14)

Currently African American students are struggling with identity development because the American educational system is divided along race and class lines. If schools are to be (re)dedicated to furthering democracy and social justice within our society, a postmodern lens is needed to “interrupt the perversions and pleasures of power, privilege, and marginalization in public schools” that holds back the construction of an authentic identity by black students (Weis & Fine, 1993, p. 2). As Slattery (2000) believes, this will challenge the modernist perspective and allow African American students to (de)construct, (re)identify, and (re)interpret their personal identities.

Critical Race Theory

The postmodern perspective has also encouraged the rise and growth of other intellectual movements such as critical race theory (CRT), cultural studies, and whiteness. Since the 1980’s, CRT has evolved to embrace most of the values, beliefs, and assumptions of postmodernism. It is an *explanatory* lens associated within postmodernism that seeks to critique race-neutral ideals and hegemonic social structures. According to Roithmayr (1999) CRT is an intellectual movement that “puts race at the center of critical analysis” (p. 1)

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT is a field of study transformed from the ideological perspective of critical feminism and critical legal studies.

Furthermore, they describe CRT as a movement that explores the relationship between race, racism, and power within the context of history, economics, identity development, and community development. However, in both cases, the nexus of critical reflection is race as seen through a postmodern lens.

We also learn from Richard Delgado (1990) that in reality, race is a social construction of individual and group experiences that needs to be understood from a sociohistorical perspective. According to Toni Morrison (1992) race is still a power signifier deeply embedded within personal identities:

Race has been metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological “race” ever was. Expensively kept,...racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one to another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever. (p. 63)

Race appears in our minds as ugly memories of our past which continue to linger in the present. In every facet of our life we are constantly reminded that race really does matter. Take for example, the experience of Cornel West (2001) who while in Manhattan waiting for his next afternoon engagement was refused nine times by various taxis. On the tenth refusal, he noticed that the cab instead chose to stop for someone of European decent. Or take for example, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) who was sitting in the VIP lounge of a upscale hotel reading a newspaper in her best lecturer outfit and was approached by a white gentleman who posed the question, “What time are y’all gonna be serving?” (p. 8). Although these examples don’t quite measure up in comparison to the

racial injustices of 1960's and 1970's, we are still reminded by West (2001) that race for some is an "urgent question of power and morality; for others, it is an everyday matter of life and death" (p. xxvi).

As seen in the above examples, the need for this *explanatory* paradigm is critical as American pop-culture continues to negatively associate and perpetuate those of non-European decent. Again as we learn from Cornel West (2001) the stark reality is that even in the twenty-first century, race still matters. It has become a deadly pathogen that has entered the circulatory system of American society and seeks to consume the biological cells of democracy and civility.

One area of American society that has been currently invaded and in the process of being ingested by this deadly pathogen is the institution of our secondary public schools. As Gause (2001) states "[t]he educational process in which African American children engage reflects European cultural and educative hegemony" (p.41). The damaging effects of race within our public school institutions can be traced back as early as the Supreme Court decision on *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. More than one hundred years later this issue has gained even more attention as Jonathan Kozol (1991) provides us with a narrative analysis of the current state of our unequal public school systems in his book *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. His book explored race from the issues of school discipline, tracking, funding, and curriculum.

These sentiments were further echoed by Ladson-Billings (1999) who also explored on various levels within the context of public schools the issue of race. First, she believes that public school curriculum still adheres to the master scripting concept.

Master scripting encourages the silencing of multiple perspectives, or the perspective of those that have been marginalized, to legitimate the outlook of the dominate culture as the primary perspective. These “other accounts or perspectives” which are ultimately omitted will not become part of the curriculum or “master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation” (Swartz, 1992, p. 341).

Secondly, Ladson-Billings (1999) states that public schools currently operate under the assumption that “instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient” (p. 22). Therefore, the achievement gap is quantitatively explored from the perspective that the black child is lacking, not that the instructional practices are inappropriate. This means that very few of the teachers understand the role of race in education and society and ultimately fail to recognize the struggles of those who are not associated with the dominant culture.

Thirdly, Ladson-Billings (1999) informs us that the area of assessment has become a major concern for African American students. Although these standardized tests may present to us what African American students don’t know, these tests also quickly tells that there is discrepancy between what is being measured and what blacks students actually do know. Currently the purpose of assessment in public schools is what Ladson-Billings (1999) describes as a “movement to legitimize African-American students’ deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism” (p. 23).

Finally, there is the concern of school funding. It is a belief that school funding is an act of institutional racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In most states school funding is based largely on property tax. It’s no surprise to see disparities in funding when areas

with greater wealth have better schools and areas with greater poverty have more inferior schools.

In the end, I understand CRT as a vital lens for understanding the experiences of black students. It is a lens that will allow me to explore the narratives of those who have been marginalized, characterized as underachievers, and institutionalized by a perpetual system of schooling. It is lens that will allow African American students the ability to (dis)assemble, (re)consider, and (re)construct their race, identity, and social status. It is a lens that will allow for me to see the difference between educating African American students and schooling them. As Mwalimu Shujaa (cited in Murrell, 2002), author and lecturer of African American Studies, notes the difference:

Schooling is a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements. Education, in contrast to schooling, is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness. (p. 3)

Cultural Studies

This view of schooling and education that speaks of “power relations”, “institutional structures”, and “cultural orientation” by Mwalimu Shujaa (cited in Murrell, 2002, p. 3) leads to the second *explanatory* lens in which I seek to understand the experiences of African American students; that lens is cultural studies.

Giroux and Giroux (2004) describe culture as:

[A] circuit of power, ideologies, and values in which diverse images, texts, and sounds are produced and circulate; identities are constructed, inhabited, and discarded; agency is manifested in both individualized and social forms;

institutions produce and constrain social practices; and discourses are created that make culture itself the object of inquiry and critical analysis...[I]t repeatedly mutates and is subject to ongoing changes and interpretations. (90-91)

I then “read” Cultural Studies as the intersection of power, politics, and culture. It is a field of study that views culture as “a central sphere of politics” (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 90). This sphere is one of politics that intertwines identity, agency, and institution and one that is controlled by the hegemonic social structures of the politically elite.

During the last two decades it is discouraging to see how the hegemonic structures of the politically elite have placed national security and global economic dominance above the institution of public school education. This trend has been evident since the Presidency of Ronald Reagan whose Administration produced the *Nation at Risk* report. That report described schools as ineffective and inefficient in its ability to produce a product (students) capable of competing in a world market (United States Department of Education, 1983). Since that report, the federal government has been on a perpetual downward slide in its funding of American public schools.

Although the *No Child Left Behind* legislation established by the Bush agenda for public school reform was thought to improve the ills of America’s public schools, there has been little, if any, significant change in the value of education. It appears that national security and global economics are also at the top of the Presidential agenda. Senator Robert Byrd (2003, ¶ 4) speaks to the irony of this current Administration’s agenda:

It is equally ironic that the Administration is seeking an estimated \$60 to \$70 billion in additional funding for Iraq from the American taxpayers at a time when

the Senate is debating adding a fraction of that amount to an appropriations bill to provide critical funding-funding that the President himself pledged to provide in his No Child Left Behind initiative-for schoolchildren in poor school districts. (Senate Floor Remarks, Sept 5, 2003)

Placing national security and global economics at the top of the Presidential agenda becomes a huge problem for the future of American society and public schools in general as we are reminded of classical works from John Dewey (1922), W.E.B. DuBois (1918/1986b), and Thomas Jefferson (1785/1999) which support the belief that a democracy can not evolve or progress without educated citizens. Developing this type of Presidential agenda becomes even more discouraging as we learn from Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) that a large portion of those that attend these poor, urban schools are African Americans.

The stark reality is that the future of American democracy is currently attending public schools today and includes those in poor, urban districts. The success and struggles of America can be seen in those classrooms across this nation.

Our public school institutions aren't merely transmitting culture knowledge and (mis)represented ideals of democracy, but they are also constructing identities, too. Schools are a key ingredient in the formation of our "self" and in our relationship to the "other." Schools are a place that teaches power and one's position in relation to power (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003). For black students this educational process is one of both affirmation and denial. They must endorse their own silencing, oppression, and marginalization while challenging mainstream stereotypes. It is a dichotomy for which I

have always struggled to understand. How does one become increasing silent yet speak with a voice that resonates.

In either case, the right to become educated for African American students has evolved into a social justice issue in the twenty-first century while our classrooms have erupted with pedagogical conflict where reading, writing, and arithmetic are being challenged by rap, race, and resistance (Gause, 2001). Furthermore, identities are being socially constructed into privileged and subordinated (or resistant) identities based on the concepts of Marxism and the notion of the master/slave struggle (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003). It is a pedagogical practice that is in direct opposition to the ideal of democracy established by our nation's founding fathers.

Why is exploring the experience of African American students so important from a cultural lens? I find the answer in the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, and Chief Justice Earl Warren. Du Bois as an African American scholar (1969) believed that the educational opportunity for African Americans was so important that without this opportunity for all intents and purposes "the Negro would...have been driven back to slavery" (p. 667). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, author and lecturer of African Studies (cited in Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 217), asserts that "if you want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children. The struggle for survival of our children is the struggle of survival for our future." Finally Chief Justice Earl Warren stated in the Supreme Courts *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, ¶ 19) decision, "Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. . . Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values."

The cultural experiences that we develop within our schools and through its curriculum will be the cultural atmosphere upon which we will live and breathe as a future nation. If it is an experience of struggling with race, then surely the future of our society will mimic that struggle. As Du Bois (1969; 1918/1986b) points out, if we fail to improve those experiences within the context of education then our nation will certainly revert back to an historical time period that as a democratic nation, we have chosen to forget.

Although the classical works of historians and philosophers were correct in connecting education as a crucial element in furthering democracy, I'm not sure those notable individuals would know eventually how the power and politics of pop-culture would challenge formal education as the main agency in socializing our society. This validates the need for a critical lens that recognizes the multiple spheres in which education can take place (Giroux, 1988; 2003).

The cultural studies lens allows me to explore multiple spheres that drive the transmitting of culture, power, and politics within our secondary public school institutions. It is a sphere of critical analysis that allows for the exploration of narratives, metaphors, and images regarding black students which can be dissected and cleansed. It is a sphere of politics that encourages social change; the type of social change that our nation can become; a change deeply rooted in the principles of freedom and justice. It is a sphere of identity development that will afford black students the opportunity to develop a democratic standpoint from which to safely view their "self" as well as their confrontation with the "other" (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003). In the end, the cultural

studies lens allows both the “self” and “other” to “read the world critically and participate in shaping and governing it (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 7). It is a realization that culture not only reflects hegemonic nature of any society, but it is also responsible for creating it.

Whiteness

I speak of the “self” and “other” while living under that assumption that my cultural experiences reflect not only who I am, but also creates who I am. I am compelled to speak about a topic that has received very little attention lately within the field of education: whiteness. As Fine, Powell, Weis, and Wong (1997) believe, the “single white coherent and male, heterosexual, and elite narrative” is very scarce within educational scholarship (p. vii).

Throughout his life W.E.B. Dubois not only spoke of blackness, but about another controversial topic of that time as well, whiteness. In his essay, *The Souls of White Folk*, Dubois (1920/1986c) states:

High in the tower, where I sit above the loud complaining of the human sea, I know many souls that toss and whirl and pass, but none there are that intrigue me more than the Souls of White Folk. Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from usual points of vantage...Rather I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know...And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rages of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them ever stripped-ugly, human. (p. 923)

It is amazing how nearly a century ago Du Bois wrote these words and still the topic of whiteness evades the consciousness of educational scholarship. However, as educational scholars have noted, this is the irony of exploring whiteness, African American

underachievement becomes the nexus of inquiry while whiteness becomes secondary behind the guise of the racial achievement gap (Fine, Powell, Weis, & Wong, 1997). The achievement gap is then used as a deficiency model to explain African American underachievement. The focus becomes the student, not the teacher. What is concealed then within the shadows of this gap is the deficiency of white, middle class teachers.

Inspired by postmodernism, white theory is an intellectual thought that places “whiteness” at the core of critical reflection and as the subject of investigation. It is a theory that refers to whiteness as “a system and ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color, ensuring existing privileges for white people in this country” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 3). It views these “existing privileges” and/or dominance of white people through historical, social, political, and cultural lens (Frankenburg, 1996). The “voice” of whiteness often mimics the language of critical pedagogy, feminism, queer theory, and critical race. The “words” under scrutiny are *race*, *racism*, and *ethnicity* (Fine, Powell, Weis, & Wong, 1997). The conversation is an inner reflection of power, privilege, and pain from a white perspective.

It’s no surprise I grew up “white.” Everything about me is white, my ethnicity, my gender, and my social class. I had white friends as a child. I attended a white school as a student. The neighborhood in which I grew up was white. I was shielded from the “other” as a child. As an adolescent I was never once asked to contemplate my racial or ethnic identity. I never once thought about “being white” although it had guided every aspect of my life. It should be to no one’s amazement then that as a white researcher exploring the experiences of black students that I incorporate the lens of whiteness. From

this lens I have learned that “whiteness and ‘other colors’ must be recognized in their rainbowed interdependence, if not in their parasitic webbing” (Fine, 1997, p. 57).

As I explore the experiences of blacks students, or what has been characterized as perpetual underachievement, from the lens of whiteness I begin to understand this need to recognize the rainbowed interdependence of “other colors” (Fine, 1987; Howard, 2003; Nieto, 1994). I begin to formulate an alternative view on the achievement gap, one that seeks to explain not what the achievement reveals about blacks, but rather a view that seeks to describe what black underachievement reveals about our secondary public school curriculum. It is a unified curriculum that according to McIntyre (1997) seeks “to reinforce a white, class-based Euro-American perspective on life” (p. 3).

This new perspective challenges conventional views of black underachievement with the analogy of a knot, a knot composed of both black and white rope. Each strand of rope is tightly interwoven to the next creating tension, or a complexity of issue regarding race (Powell, 1997). In order to untie the knot, we can’t simply pull from one strand of the rope; this only makes the tension greater. Instead we must loosen from both directions. From the direction of whiteness, this process requires identity deconstruction and critical discourse involving race, racism, and power (McIntyre, 1997). It is my belief that using whiteness as a *explanatory* lens exploring the experiences of African American students will inform and improve our teaching practices of African American students. This exploration brings forward privilege, power, and politics associated with white dominance to the forefront of educational dialogue. It encourages teachers to explore how these existing structures guide their praxis within the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework can be described as “a detailed model” of the problem based on “evidence garnered from prior research and/or experience plus the value assumptions underlying” the current topic of interest (Mayer & Greenwood, 1980, p. 121). It is the specific lens of *justification* for a study which “identifies something that is going on in the world, something that itself is problematic or that has consequences that are problematic” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 34). We explore this problem because the phenomena under investigation are not yet fully comprehended; we construct a conceptual framework to add more information to the current area of inquiry not only from the perspective of previous scholars, but also from the perspective of the researcher.

In essence, it is something that is currently being constructed as opposed to something that has been constructed. It is collaboration between *ideas* of the current scholars and the *ideas* of the current researcher (Maxwell, 2005). This collaboration develops into a specific lens of *justification* which provides a more comprehensive manner upon which to view the current problem of inquiry (See Figure 2).

The current problem of inquiry for this study is the experiences and identity development of African American students. To improve experiences and identity within the context of school for African American students, current studies have recommended that future research pursue more approaches of qualitative inquiry (Howard, 2001; Howard, 2003; Zirkel, 2002; Teranishi, Allen, & Solorzano, 2004). Past scholarship has utilized a mixture of quantitative and qualitative inquiry to understand the experiences of African Americans (Billingsley, 1992; Fraizer, 1957; George & Harrison, 2001; Hoit-

Thetford, 1986; Howard, 2003; Persell, 1981; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). These inquiries have explored the historical context of African Americans in education, family heritage, deficit theories, access to academically rigorous courses, and the development of racial identity. Until recently, past research regarding this topic has been narrow in scope because of its limited contribution by all stakeholders (Howard, 2003). At most the dialogue regarding the underachievement of African American students has been very subjective with contributions from teachers, institutional scholars and policy-makers. Absent from the discussions about African Americans and education has been the voice of those most affected by these conversations, African American students.

Before exploring the narratives of African American students I believe that it is critical to become familiar with the role of history and the past context within which black students have experienced “schooling.” As Murrell (2002) stresses failure to become familiar with the role of history and the past context the black educational experience will encourage “the ideologies of oppression that have evolved in the United States will continue to shape educational practices that inimical to Black achievement” (p. 20). This perspective contributes a better understanding into the construction of past, present, and future narratives of black students within an educational context.

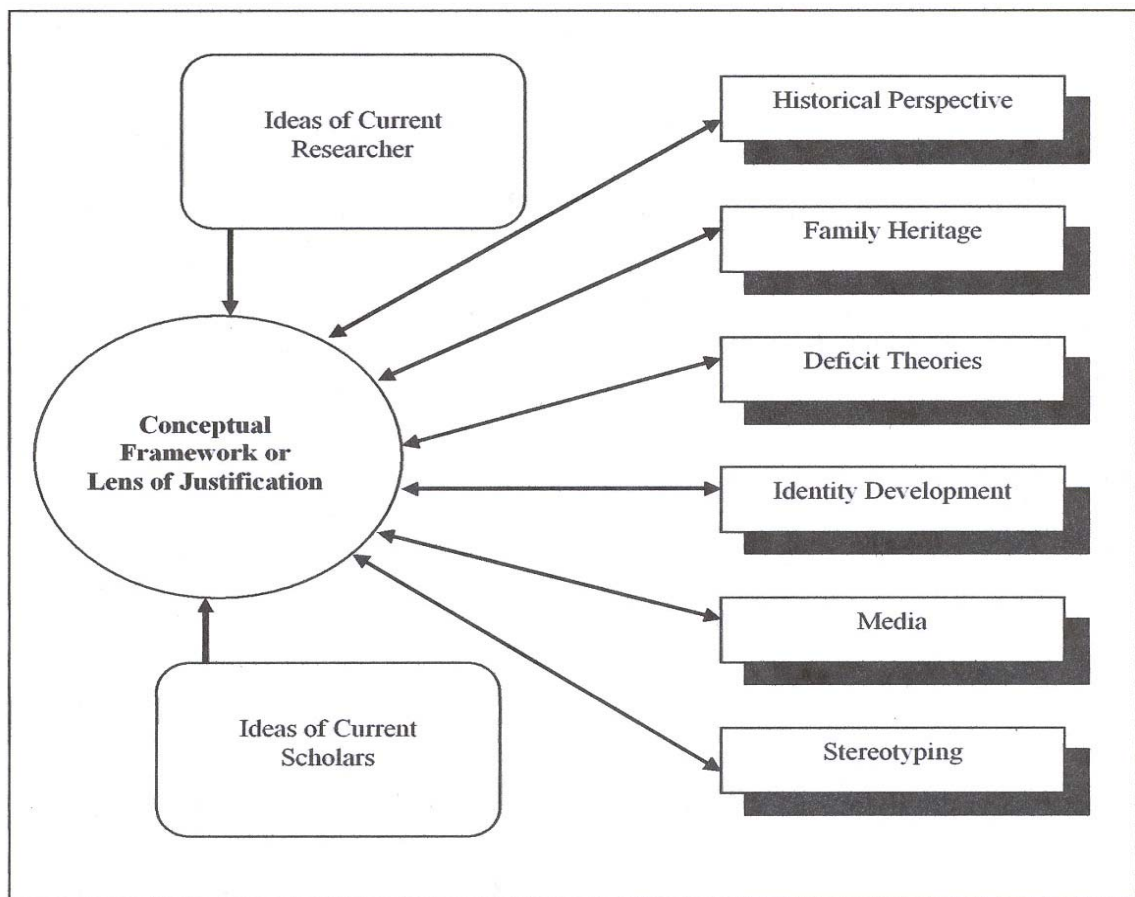
Historical Perspective

According to Gholson-Driver (2001) laws addressing compulsory attendance of school aged children were first instituted sometime during the 17th century. These laws were established for privileged and free children. Children of slaves and those of lesser privilege were not required (or allowed) to attend these private schools. It wasn't until

the early part of the 19th century that debate and controversy arose within these private and exclusive educational institutions. At the core of this controversy was religious doctrine. As a result of disputes involving the teaching of religious doctrines, various religious groups began to establish their own system of education during this time period. However, by the end of the 19th century laws challenging the existence of these private religious educational institutions were beginning to emerge (McClellan, 1999).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework Concept Map.



According to McClellan (1999) the first of such laws were observed in the Northwest region of the United States where all (white) children were required to attend public schools. As a result, the Oregon School Law of 1922 was the earliest attempt to illegitimate the education of white children outside of the public school sphere. The law was not concerned with the education of black students and did not require compulsory attendance for anyone outside of European decent. However, during the earliest part of the 1900's, the Federal government attempted to end this debate over private versus public schools. In an attempt to find an amicable solution, the Supreme Court rendered it decision in the *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) case and "affirmed the doctrine of compulsory school attendance [and] established the role of parochial and private schools in satisfying the state's demand that children receive schooling" (LaMorte, 1999, p. 20).

Still absent from this debate of compulsory attendance was consideration regarding the education of African Americans. Prior to the Civil War most states considered educating blacks in the public sphere illegal (Hoit-Thetford, 1986). It is believed that during this time period there were nearly 4.5 million African Americans in the United States and less than 5% of them could write, read, or perform basic arithmetic (Fleming, 1981). Although blacks were not given the same opportunity as whites to become educated within the traditional public sphere, they were offered an alternative method within a religious and private sphere in the form of missionary schools. The goal these schools were to perform religious conversions of slaves and maintain the status quo of their inferiority within a society to whites (Hoit-Thetford, 1986).

In 1863, *The Emancipation Proclamation*, issued by President Abraham Lincoln freed all slaves from states that seceded from the Union (National Archives & Records Administration, 2006). Still, African Americans had many issues to overcome within the context of education. Various laws were passed throughout the Union regarding the education of freed blacks. In the South, educating freed blacks was prohibited while the North developed a dual system of education, one for white teachers and students the other for black teachers and students (LaMorte, 1999). Nonetheless, it appeared that whenever educational opportunities were available for blacks, the learning experiences were considered being on a less than basic level of cognition (Hoit-Thetford, 1986).

Near the end of the 19th century, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896, ¶ 36) Supreme Court case made school segregation legal with the controversial “separate but equal” doctrine. The Supreme Court believed the educational context of blacks, regardless of how inferior, was equal to the educational context of whites. The inferiority of the educational context of blacks, that the Supreme Court supported, showed that educational opportunities, funding, and resources were far behind that of their white counterparts (Miller, 1995).

Nearly fifty years after the “separate but equal doctrine”, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, ¶ 12) Supreme Court case created radical changes for the educational context of African American students. Citing the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, the Supreme Court in a unanimous decision overturned their earlier “separate but equal” doctrine and made segregation within public schools unconstitutional. In their ruling, the voice of the Supreme Court stated that under any

condition, "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." This historical case eventually changed the landscape of all public school facilities across America during the 1950's and for the next two decades.

Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case, there have been numerous reforms created and reports conducted in an effort to improve the educational opportunities of African American students as well as all non-white students. The first of such reforms was the *Elementary and Secondary School Act* of 1965, or ESEA, which was established by the Johnson Administration to provide funds for disadvantaged schools, many of which were populated by African American students (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Shortly after the *ESEA* was passed by Congress, the progress and efforts to improve the black educational experience had become stagnant. As a result, a 1966 report, dubbed the Coleman Report, was conducted by sociologist James Coleman for the federal government and explored the treatment and condition of individuals within public schools based on race, ethnicity, and religion (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). This massive report provided debatable results regarding the effect schools have on student achievement. Nevertheless, according to Thomas (1981) *The Coleman Report* documented inequalities "in school inputs and outputs between blacks and whites as measured by school faculty, the racial composition of the schools and Black-White differences in performance on standardized achievement tests" (p. 3). However, according to some, the research provided humiliating evidence for the United States Department of Education. One researcher proclaimed that the simple fact of the matter is

that all we learned from the Coleman Report is that it is all in the family (Lagemann, 2000).

Later during the 1980's the Reagan Administration issued a second prominent report, entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983). It provided numerical evidence to what many researchers believed to be a "crisis in education" (Fowler, 2000, p. 182). Its primary objective was to increase awareness for the need of accountability measures in education. Five years later another report, called *One Third of a Nation* (1988), conducted by the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, demonstrated that gaps between whites and non-whites were present in all aspects of life that hinder the quality of living of non-whites (Miller, 1995).

More recently in the 1990's a second act, the *Educate American Act* (United States Department of Education, 1996), also known as the *Goals 2000*, was developed by the Clinton Administration and passed by Congress. The primary object of the *Education America Act* was to ensure that all students, even students of color, reached appropriate levels of achievement in math, reading, and science.

As a result of these reforms and education acts, disparities in educational achievement among racial groups have become increasingly publicized over the last two decades. The widening of the alleged racial achievement gap based on standardized test scores and what has been labeled as the persistent failure of schools to educate all children have prompted Congress to reauthorize the ESEA of 1965. In 2002, under the Bush Administration this Act became known as the No Child Left Behind Act. According to the United States Department of Education (2006), the goal of this initiative

is to improve both the educational experience and opportunity for “disadvantage and minority students and their peers.”

The issues regarding the educational experience of African American students are not solely isolated to the context of schooling. Indeed, these issues are socially constructed and fabricated within the large context of mainstream society; a mainstream society whose standard model of traditional schooling isn’t exactly congruent with the African American view of achievement (Murrell, 2002). According to Brown (1995) these issues are leading America and its educational system down a path of self-destruction or what he considers as “national suicide” (p. 8). In the end, the realization is that there are a plethora of factors that affect the educational experiences of African American students, many of which are situated within the narratives of American history (West, 2001).

Family Heritage

When examining experiences of black students, it is critical to explore the historical aspects of family heritage regarding the African American culture that has survived several centuries. Franklin Frazier (1957) debated most scholars and argued that no aspect of the ancient African culture can be found in contemporary African American families. Another scientist who supported this view by Frazier claimed that, “the Negro is only an American and nothing else...He has no history and culture to guard and protect” (Billingsley, 1992, p. 83). These views for years became an obstacle to identifying traces of the African culture in contemporary families. This perspective also

caused many African Americans to struggle in the development of racial and ethnic identity.

Until the work of an anthropologist named Melville Herskovitz, few scientists have opposed this popular view of Frazier. Nonetheless, Billingsley (1992) chronicled the journey of African Americans from the beginning of civilization to the Atlantic slave trade. He believes that “a number of African family patterns survived the American experience, diluted and transformed by it, but not destroyed” (p. 94). For example, one feature that has survived over the centuries is the dominance of blood ties and extended families over marriage and the immediate family. Another feature that often goes misinterpreted is the cohesiveness and acceptance characterized within blended families. Other features Billingsley felt survived included child rearing techniques, the role and reverence of elders, flexibility in the role of family members, restraint and responsibility for caring of the larger community. All of these features he feels have an enormous impact on understanding the current patterns of traditional families. Billingsley (1992) supports Du Bois’s view on the heritage of African Americans and the importance of these family features in modern times that states, “There is a distinct nexus between Africa and America which, though broken and perverted, is nevertheless not to be neglected by the careful student” (p. 95).

Frazier (1957), in his work *The Negro Family*, provides his readers a historical lens in which to view African American families from the development of plantation systems to the migration of free blacks to urban communities. As mentioned earlier, Frazier questioned the association of ancient African heritage with contemporary

families. Nonetheless, he believed that the history of African Americans, especially during the slave trade and beyond, had a massive impact on institutionalizing the Negro community. Frazier (1957) believed that slavery heavily influenced the structure of the family. It constructed a family system with female leaders and absent fatherly figures because of harsh and cruel conditions related to slavery.

Stability in the family system that was developed during this time period became lost shortly thereafter as a result of emancipation. Freedom brought forth confusion with the multidimensional African American family. The African American population became split during this time period. Some tried to assimilate the culture of their white owners and develop more stable households. Others fastened to their heritage and migrated to the large urban centers of the North (Frazier, 1957). Nonetheless, in the end, it is believed that slavery, along with the notion of black “double consciousness”; both have had a devastating impact on the construction of the African American family (Du Bois, 1989). Both have negatively influenced the social organization of the family structure, economic security and class structure. These phenomena coupled with issues associated with power and dominance within African American families have (re)constructed, (re)identified, and (re)interpreted the African American family as a vital element in preserving family heritage and in developing future generations of democratic citizens (Du Bois, 1969; Frazier, 1957).

While examining African American heritage, it is difficult to overlook the Federal government’s attempt to become more familiar with the structure of black families. *The Moynihan Report* was this attempt to gain a greater understanding. Many within the

Federal government characterize this report conducted by the United States Department of Labor (1965) during the 1960's for Johnson's Presidential Committee as an attempt by the president to fulfill his commitment to erase color lines and fight poverty. Although the purpose of such a report is debatable, in its rawest form it is mainstream Eurocentric society's attempt to view an Afrocentric cultural structure.

It is a historical document, to say the least, for our nation because it is the first of its kind to engage at length through a Eurocentric historical lens the African American family and community. The goal of the document is to help white America identify with and understand blacks as a group. The researchers highlight how the American ideals of Liberty and Equality have failed the African American population, which has resulted in a call for national action. Nonetheless, the author of the report draws a conclusion from weak empirical data and presents a racist assumption that, "at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965, Chapter II The Negro Family, ¶ 1).

Aspects of the African American family that are blamed for this deterioration are: 1) dissolved marriages; 2) increases in illegitimate births; 3) female lead families; 4) dependency on welfare programs; and 5) the emergence of a weak father figure (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). The research implies that the origin of these mainstream societal breakdowns began in slavery and continued during the Reconstruction Era. The report by the United States Department of Labor indicated that slavery disrupted the structure of the African American family and that migration northward became "immensely disruptive of traditional social patterns." The writers of this report also

believed at that time that the disruption of traditional social patterns would continue to doom future generations of African American families until the structure is reorganized.

In summation, *The Moynihan Report* (1965) describes how this massive disorganization in the family structure has thrown the African American family into the cyclic nature of poverty. This cycle is believed in essence to breed economically deprived, intellectually inferior, juveniles for future generations of the African American community (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). The researchers gave no solutions, but the report clearly defined the problem. The investigator for the United States Department of Labor (1965) concluded his investigation quoting Franklin Frazier:

As the result of family disorganization a large proportion of the Negro children and youth have not undergone the socialization which only the family can provide. The disorganized families have failed to provide for their emotional needs and have not provided the discipline and habits, which are necessary for personality development. The disorganized family has failed in its function as a socializing agency, it has handicapped the children in their relations to the institutions in the community.

Deficit Theories

Persell (1981) indicates that many social and educational reform policies are deeply rooted in principle themes of deficiency models. Most researchers who support deficiency models refer to the family structure as the source of the problem. The oldest and heavily debated deficiency model discussed is in the area of genetics. In an extensive review of literature on past research of twins and adoptions, Persell (1981) indicates how misinterpretation and racist conclusions negatively impact assumptions about a particular

race. This critical misunderstanding assumes that IQ and ability testing are crucial in deciding an individual's position in life and achievement potential.

Another misunderstanding presumes IQ as genetically inherited. This viewpoint is the perspective of cultural theorist Herrnstein and Murray (1994) who co-authored the book titled, *The Bell Curve*. The authors attest:

Inequality of endowments, including intelligence, is a reality. Trying to pretend that inequality does not really exist has led to disaster. Trying to eradicate inequality with artificially manufactured outcomes has led to disaster. It is time for America once again to try living with inequality, as life is lived: understanding that each human being has strengths and weaknesses, qualities we admire and qualities we do not admire, competencies and incompetencies, assets and debits; that the success of each human life is not measured externally but internally. (pp. 551-552)

Herrnstein and Murray (1994) three very broad assumptions: (1) since the beginning of the 1900's society has become more stratified based on intelligence; (2) that intelligence can be linked to many of society's deviant behaviors; and (3) that differences in intelligence between race and ethnicity are genetically determined. These assumptions support a very controversial school of thought, known as *hereditarianism* which supports the belief that the outcomes in an individual's life, especially intelligence, are biologically determined. In the end, *The Bell Curve* was a scientific approach to further racist views that blacks are genetically inferior to whites.

Later Stephen Gould (1996), notable scholar and science historian, critiqued Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) claims of biological determinism in his own work titled *The Mismeasure of Man*. Gould (1996) argues:

Intelligence, in their formulation, must be depictable as a single number, capable of ranking people in linear order, genetically based, and effectively immutable. If any of these premises are false, their entire argument collapses. For example, if all are true except immutability, then programs for early intervention in education might work to boost IQ permanently, just as a pair of eyeglasses may correct a genetic defect in vision. The central argument of *The Bell Curve* fails because most of the premises are false. (pp 4-5)

Ultimately, Gould believed that the influence of society and one's social class background were just as strong predictors in the outcome of one's life (as well as intelligence) as Herrnstein and Murray (1994) IQ and the Armed Forces Qualifying Test could link race and intelligence.

Persell (1981) wrote about another type of deficiency, this one related to culture. The cultural deficit theory supports what Franklin Frazier (1957) indicated in his early research on blacks that African Americans have lost their culture. Most followers of the cultural deficit theory support their claim with the rationale that the "home has no books, no magazines, radio, television, newspapers—it's empty" (Persell, 1981, p. 25). Although this is a massive generalization, it presumes that the child arrives to school with nothing and assumes that the home is the blame. This "emptiness" spoken of in the above quote ultimately leads to low self-esteem, poverty, unequal educational opportunities and a devastating, self-fulfilling prophecy (Persell, 1981).

Contemporary cultural deficit theorists view and deem that the current structure that frames present-day African American culture is preventing them from being successful as students, professionals, and as a collective community (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). They believe that schools should be the place to teach cultural norms of success or the social norms for Eurocentric public

behavior. As Freeman A. Hrabowski III, university president, asserts, “[Schools must] give them [black students] the support to get the values they need. . . . I’m talking about values like hard work, respect for authority and willingness to listen to the teacher. Many parents don’t know how important these things are” (cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 78-79).

These contemporary cultural deficit theorists (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) gather most of the support for their argument of cultural deficiency by misrepresenting the work of social anthropologist John Ogbu (2003), in his book titled *Black Students in An Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. This eight month ethnographical research project explored the underachievement of black students of a wealthy Ohio suburb named Shaker Heights. What Ogbu and his group of researcher found was that according to standardized measurements, black students were considerably behind their white counterparts. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) would have you believe that a lack of “cultural inheritance” is at the root of the problem of black underachievement (p. 121).

Ogbu (2003), on the other hand, provides a cultural-ecological lens in which to view this phenomenon of black underachievement within a wealthy suburb. This perspective “addresses the system (e.g., how minorities are treated by society and its institutions) and community forces (e.g., how minorities interpret and respond to the treatment) as mediums of influence on student academic performance” (Allen-Jones, 2004, ¶ 7).

Cultural deficiency theories illustrate racist ideologies that are immersed in a white Eurocentric society. But they fail to explain how economics, social contacts and school experience influence the disparities between white and black achievement. Persell (1981) opposes these theories and interjects that if either theory were true, children of color “would never be able to learn successfully” (p. 29). If the deficiency theories were true, one would believe a correlation between deficiency, education, and economics exists.

Nonetheless, as the racial achievement gap continues to widen, so does the rise and growth of the black middle class (Brown, 1995). This supports the work of Persell (1981) who believes that assumptions about race and class do not negatively impact the educational achievement and growth of African American youth. In essence, those within educational institutions use cultural deficiency theory as a diversion of responsibility away from the instructional practices of classroom teachers toward the criticism of the African American family’s failure of their children. These theories hinder the intellectual growth of African American students. Policies implemented on the deficiency assumption create separate and distinct educational opportunities for black students which are inferior to their white counterparts.

Still, cultural theorists describe the African American family as disorganized, lost members of society (Gehlbach, 1966). They have developed feelings of “inferiority, marginality, helplessness and other psychological traits” that have prevented them from becoming productive members of society (p. 28). This description of the African American family supports W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1986a) reflection of an American

society fascinated with developing color lines. Although W.E.B. Du Bois wouldn't totally agree with the work or writings of Sally Gehlbach (1966), he did believe that mainstream Eurocentric-society was fascinated with the concept of a Black and White America. History has shown that controversial issues contended by popular and scholarly literatures typically debate those divisive topics on the basis of color. These seriously debated issues have heightened insensitivity toward color and heavily influenced how mainstream society views the interrelated worlds based on race and class.

Similar to the *Moynihan Report* (1965), cultural theorists assume that the structure of the white middle-class family is the correct structure for every family in America (Gehlbach, 1966). It continues with the historical stereotype of African Americans as the "respectable lowers" (p. 3). Although the intent of the research is scholarly, the voice of the writer and her comparison to Mexican families of poverty clearly continue to position the African American culture below that of other minority groups.

Gehlbach's (1966) work also continues the theme of America's socially constructed society that seeks to differentiate racial groups, while displaying the superiority of one race over another (Banks, 1995). This view is supported by her quote of James Baldwin who stated, "Negroes in this country...are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black" (cited in Gehlbach, 1966, p. 23).

This socially constructed society emphasizes the negative aspects observed in mainstream society regardless of race and class and labels it as an exclusive African American trait. Unfortunately, this continues to position much criticism on the African

American culture and family structure as the blame for the problem (Persell, 1981). This racial discrimination and institutional racism of sorts creates difficulties for African Americans when it comes to education.

In an effort to better understand the experiences of African Americans, some scholars (Allen, 2000; Hill, 1998) have turned to historical revisionism which offers an alternative view to cultural deficiency theories that have so negatively characterized the cultural structural of African American families. It is a holistic perspective that incorporates history, ecology, culture, critical analysis, and identity development (Allen, 2000; Hill, 1998). According to Hill (1998), historical revisionism is a multidisciplinary lens that includes fields such as history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy, and economics. Seeking to negotiate a more accurate portrayal of history, it is a broader analytic lens that doesn't place blame on the cultural foundations of the black community, but rather offers a better explanation with regards to the influences of a culture dominated by Eurocentric values.

Identity Development

Over the past several decades there has been a considerable amount of scholarship written regarding the topic of identity development (Cross, 1971; 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 1999; Erikson, 1968; Tatum, 1997). The most popular theme within this scholarship has been in the area of racial and ethnic identity development. These researchers have explored ethnic identity, black identity, black social identity, and the distinction between racial and ethnical identity. There are various other models of ethnic and racial identity other than the ones described in this section but I have not included

them here because it goes beyond the scope of this inquiry. What I have included is a brief description of the more prominent identity development models because identity development is one aspect of a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Erik Erikson (1968) explored the development of ethnic identity through the lens of social development theory. This theory presented eight stages of social development beginning at infancy and ending with death. Each stage is marked with a conflict for which a successful outcome would produce a virtue. According to Erikson (1968) identity development is based on a constant negotiation between the *self* and *others*. The term *self* is meant to describe both the individual and collective while the *other* is described as anything outside of the individual or collective self within a social sphere.

This process leads to what he has labeled by Erikson (1968) as an “identity crisis.” The constant negotiation between the *self* and *others* is problematic for ethnic groups because of the hegemonic nature of American society; an American society that tends to use cultural, historical, and social dominance as a tool in deforming the identity development of certain minority groups. The end result of this interaction is the formation of an identity consciousness that can be described as “a special form of painful self-consciousness which dwells on discrepancies between one’s self-esteem, the aggrandized self-image as an autonomous person, and one’s appearance in the eyes of others” (Erikson, 1968, p. 183).

Shortly after Erikson’s work exploring identity within the context of social development, William Cross Jr. introduced the psychological aspects of becoming black, something he labeled the *Nigrescence Theory* (Cross, 1971; 1991). Over the course of

several decades his theory has been revised and expanded (Cross, 1991; Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). Nonetheless, the crux of his research stills explores both the individual and community development of blacks. The work within *Nigrescence* “seeks to clarify and expand the discourse on Blackness by paying attention to the variability and diversity of Blackness” within the context of self, community, and others (p. 209).

As suggested in the current revision of Cross’s *Nigrescence Theory* black identity development is an evolutionary process, a process that is constantly changing (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). Hence there was a need to re-conceptualize the original model. This new model explores the black identity development in four distinct stages: (1) pre-encounter; (2) encounter; (3) immersion-emersion; and (4) internalization. In short, Cross’s theory of black identity development explores “qualitative differences in behavior over time” and thought to be a recycling process where certain stages are revisited throughout once life (Cross, 1991; Worrell, Cross, and Vandiver, 2001, p. 208; Tatum, 1997).

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (1999) have recently explored in greater depth black social identity development. This inquiry investigates black identity development from social construction perspective, a very important perspective because the “identity of any particular Black person lays claim to multiple identity reference points (p. 29). The authors introduce buffering, bonding, bridging, code-switching, and individualism as key functions in the analysis of black social identity. Their framework presents six stages to this development: (1) Infancy and childhood; (2) Pre-Adolescence; (3) Adolescence; (4) Late Adolescence and Early Adulthood; (5) Adult Nigrescence; and (6) Identity

Refinement. This framework explores the negotiation between the black self and “situation[s], workplace[s], school[s], or social setting[s]” it encounters and the method in which the black self “should exit all [of these social] situations with grace, confidence, sophistication, and a sense of efficacy” (p. 44).

Although the terms “race” and “ethnicity” have been used interchangeably in the field of identity development, some researchers have chosen to make a distinction. In the book, *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”* Beverly Tatum (1997), scholar and current president of Spelman College, discusses the difference between those two terms. Racial identity refers to the process of identification based on physical signifiers that are constructed within a social context. As Branch (1999), asserts racial identity “is a concept that is derived from a genetic designation based on phenotypic characteristics (i.e., physical features such as, skin color and hair texture). It is an idea that is clearly rooted in history” (p. 7).

On the other hand Tatum (1997) considers ethnic identity as the process of identification based on the shared values, beliefs or experiences. It can be thought of as an identity constructed by “a group of people with a common historical heritage, originating in the same place, and sharing cultural expressions such as manner of dress, art, music, food, literature, and other concrete manifestations” (Branch, 1999, p. 7).

Other scholarship within the field of identity development has provided an additional framework for exploring the construction of black identity. This scholarship has focused on the development of what many researchers call academic identity (Graham, 1989; Howard, 2003; Powell, 1989; Welch & Hodges, & Warren, 1989). This

framework provides a socio-cultural perspective in exploring black identity within the context of school.

It is believed that the earliest pioneers that explored this framework were John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham. Their work provided evidence that in order to achieve academic success, black students perceived that they must give up all aspects of their social, cultural, and ethnic heritage (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1990). In essence black students must develop a *raceless* persona which removes them further away from any concept of being authentically black. It is believed that academic identity is a social construction based on the historical perspectives of race, gender, and class that occurs within the processes of educational hegemony (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fordham, 1996; Howard, 2003; Ogbu, 1990; Powell, 1989).

African American students are at risk of not being able to develop a positive academic identity. The various beliefs and practices of mainstream society, especially those within the context of schooling, are prohibiting many African American adolescents from developing such an identity (Howard, 2003). The traditional paradigm of education adheres to philosophical beliefs of Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Robert Hutchins which “maintains that schools should model democracy, treat everyone as unique individuals, and focus on rigorous core curriculum” while actively engaging all learners (National Paideia Center, 2001, pg 4). Most schools don’t hold fast to this traditional paradigm and as a result schools are a direct reflection of mainstream society. Unfortunately, that reflection is of a stratified social structure that doesn’t allow everyone to be treated as a unique individual. As a result of this stratification, Howard (2003)

indicates, for “many students of color, schools have become sites of resistance, alienation, silence, and ultimately failure” (p.5).

Instead of developing into educational institutions that support individual identity and cultural diversity, schools are now battlegrounds where the constructions of both the individual and collective self are under relentless attacks. For African American students this means they must struggle with the choice of accepting or rejecting the academic identity of success that is associated with “acting white.” Such an identity is directly at odds with the black cultural ethos (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). It is the competition between the socially constructed concepts of school and culture that disturbs the development of a positive academic identity. This development becomes even more complicated for African Americans when individual, collective, and school identities are incongruent (Howard, 2003). As a result, many African American students are shortchanged with a “dumbing down” of the curriculum, tracking into lower level course, and inappropriately disciplinary measures because of cultural misunderstandings. This leads to the construction of academic identities based on pop-cultural ideals and media perceptions which reinforces the mis-education of African American students.

Media

In examining pop-culture some scholars may critically analyze the media as a devastating weapon with the potential to penetrate the deepest fragile inner-structures of our minority youth and develop a socially constructed view that “Everybody knows that black people are bad” (Brown, 1995, p. 121). This perspective also believes that the media’s ability to promote an environment of anti-intellectualism is one aspect of a multi-

dimensional phenomenon. This popular conceptualization created by the mass media “that black people are bad” has indoctrinated our minority youth into believing that they are, in essence, a menace to society.

Popular news reports for nearly two decades have indicated an alleged rise in incidences of violence and drug use among African American youth with an inherent decline in school achievement (Brown, 1995; Howard, 2003; Johnson, 1991; Stroman, 1991). However, from these reports, one cannot conclude that African American youths enjoy harming others, selling drugs, and being un-intellectual. Rather, they are characters fulfilling their roles socially constructed by one of the most powerful mediums in our culture. As Malcolm X suggested, “the media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that is power. Because they control the mind of the masses” (cited in Dobbs, 2003, ¶ 156). This is especially true for the minds of young African Americans who are consistently inundated by the media with corrupt images and messages of low self-esteem (Brown, 1995).

The fact of the matter is that when it comes to the media in America today-the image is the message and the media is the image (Brown, 1995). Unfortunately, this policy is not helpful for a democratic nation in search of social justice from past violations of civil rights issues. As Ted Turner indicates, “the media is too concentrated, too few people own too much. There’s really five companies that control 90 percent of what we read, see, and hear. It’s not healthy” (cited in Martell, 2003, ¶ 13). This lack of diverse control creates an unhealthy America, and has been identified as “the

Conspiracy” by Jawanza Kunjufu, who describes this phenomenon as “the systematic and institutional effort to render Black boys unable to function in a postindustrial society” (cited in Swerdlick & Fullilove, 1991, p. 488).

“The Conspiracy” of the mass media has allowed images of dependency, isolation, and inferiority to become a culture of reality for minority youth in America. It is a culture that has transformed the socialization processes of African American youth and the development of adolescence racial identity. Indeed, the media has become a “uniquely potent teacher” for this marginalized segment of the population that seeks to further the formal schooling process warned of by Kunjufu in his book *Counter the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, Volume III* (cited in Stroman, 1991, p. 319). It has mis-educated our minority youth with socially constructed images that define Blacks as impoverished, irresponsible, unemployed violent criminals. This formal schooling process that never associates academic achievement with success for African American youth has allowed schools to “become sites of resistance, alienation, silence, and ultimately failure” (Brown, 1995; Howard, 2003, p. 5).

Although some scholars may argue that this is an extreme over-generalization citing program analyses from the early part of the 1980’s decade that discovered equal characterization of African Americans. A more recent study of program analyses from the late 1990’s as cited by Ward (2004), has portrayed blacks as “more provocative and less professional” and ascertained as “the laziest and least respected ethnic group” (p. 285). This supports the claim that ethnic-group disparities in the media still exist and leads to negative socially constructed images of African American. As discussed by

Brown (1995) it has assisted in the development in a culture of dependency and increased a sense of entitlement for some African Americans youths.

Unfortunately, many African American adolescents will embrace negative images and stereotypes offered by the media as a result of being socialized within a dominant Eurocentric culture (Tatum, 1997; Ward, 2004). The affect of this socialization has been harmful to the social, cognitive, and affective development of African Americans. The media has been able to compete, and at times defeat, other socializing agents as a source of information regarding cultural identity (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, & Roberts, 1978; Greenberg, Mastro & Brand, 2002; Ward 2004). In essence, the media has mis-educated our minority youth with destructive information regarding the structure and function of the family, community, and the schools in which African Americans attend.

As a result, minority youth have limited opportunities to construct positive self-identities because they've been mis-informed, mis-educated, and mis-represented by the media with FEAR [False Evidence that Appears Real] in regards to beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with race (C. P. Gause, class lecture, January 10, 2005). With the media as a main source of guidance in the socialization process of African American youth, identity development struggles, opportunities for upward mobility diminish, and achievement declines (Brown, 1995; Stroman, 1991; & Tatum, 1997; Ward, 2004).

In the words of Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1933/1990) author of *The Miseducation of the Negro*:

When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or to go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (p. xiii)

In essence, this is what the mass media has mis-educated our African American youths to do—"find his proper place." The media has controlled "a man's thinking" and conditioned African Americans to follow a stereotypical path that doesn't include financial success, intellectual development, or the transmission of cultural heritage through the development of a positive ethnic identity.

The media has created an ideology of anti-intellectualism for African American youth through "the most powerful entity on earth," the mass media. This socially constructed ideology is firmly grounded within the principles of stereotyping by the media and in the socialization power of the media. The media has become an educator, teaching millions of African Americans with a curriculum that supports the formal schooling processes, as described earlier by Mwalimu Shujaa (cited in Murrell, 2002), in an effort to preserve the status quo. This curriculum used by the mass media has failed to engage, empower, and edify African American youth; therefore, it has mis-educated and created a culture that associates academic achievement with failure as a black student that continues to manifest itself (C. P. Gause, class lecture, January, 10, 2005).

Stereotyping

According to Kellow and Jones (2005, Abstract, ¶ 1), stereotype threat "refers to the risk associated with confirming a negative stereotype based on group membership." It is an area of investigation first established by Steel and Aronson (1995) which explored

the difference in standardized measurement between black and white students. They explained these differences based on anxiety and knowledge of negative stereotypes related to one's racial or ethnic membership. Their work suggested the need for a non-evaluative (or culture-free) approach to measuring achievement or intelligence.

Stereotyping is one of an arsenal of weapons used by pop-culture to target and mis-educate our nation's minority youth. It supports the belief that African American students have become a menace to society. As one student quoted, "Everyone knows that black people are bad. That's the way we are." This was in response to a question that asked several middle school-aged African American students to discuss their impressions of African American people (Brown, 1995, p.121). What followed was a plethora of responses that displayed the tragic consequences of the mis-education of minority students by our Eurocentric value laden society. It had poisoned their minds with negative stereotypes that have infected African American communities, schools, and the culture upon which they use to define themselves. This socially constructed environment has conditioned the minds of minority youth to believe in the stereotypical images of inferiority and unsuccessfulness (Brown, 1995; Ward, 2004). These students were not rejecting themselves; they were merely embracing the stereotype of their environment created by mainstream society.

Beverly Tatum (1997), Monique Ward (2004), Kellow and Jones (2005), and Steele and Aronson (1995) all describe how stereotyping can have an everlasting effect on the identity development of African American youth and subsequently their achievement. It is natural for adolescent youth to explore the concept of identity. It is

even more natural for African American youth to explore the concept of racial identity as an adolescent. They will automatically search for the answer to the question, “What does it mean to be Black?” (Tatum, 1997, p. 53). They will survey the possibilities to answer this question regarding race because that is how they are perceived by the world.

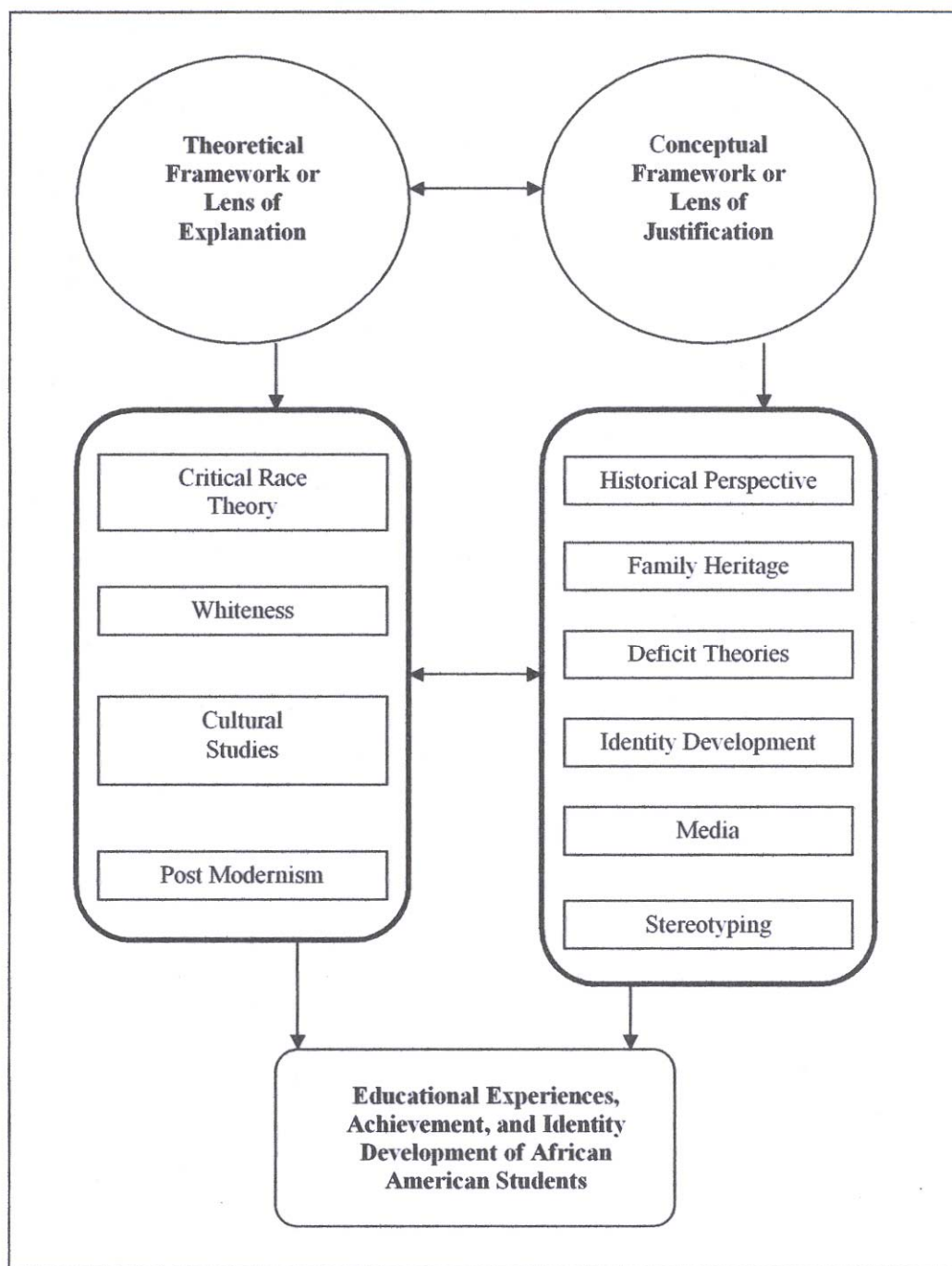
This is quite evident in the example Beverly Tatum (1997, p. 122) uses with her son David. When asked the question, “How old are you?” David responds by telling everyone his age and subsequently they are astonished by his height. He doesn’t mention his racial membership and those questioning him don’t question his ethnicity. However, Beverly Tatum encourages the reader to explore the idea of racial imaging. In her next example, she encourages you to think of David as a tall, dark, black adolescent walking down the city streets dressed in hip hop attire. Imagine how mainstream society would react to this particular character? Her point is that they are not going to say, “Gee, you’re tall for your age.” Our response, black or white, is geared to the mis-representation or negative stereotyping that has “ridiculed and vilified” African Americans in popular culture (Brown, 1995, p. 125; Ward, 2004).

Ironically, African American activist, Jesse Jackson admits racial stereotyping: “I hate to admit, but I have reached a stage in my life that if I am walking down a dark street at night and I see that a person behind me is White, I subconsciously feel relieved” (Brown, 1995, p. 127). Instead of thinking about the criminal activity of the neighborhood, the media has conditioned us to mentally retrieve racial stereotypes that have “been reinforced and spread around the world” by the mass media (Brown, 1995, p. 125).

Think about the examples of Susan Smith who killed her three children and blamed it on a black assailant who allegedly car-jacked her in South Carolina. Or, for that matter, Charles Stuart, who murdered his pregnant wife and placed responsible on an African American gunman. These are both excellent examples of what happens when the media has unfairly determined that African Americans are naturally prone to commit racially and culturally motivated crimes (Brown, 1995). Although these are examples of two white people blaming black men as their perpetrators, the media supported these accusations and accentuated the fact that the alleged assailants were black. With these images, what are young African Americans to think? Is there any hope for success in a mainstream society that supports white superiority or one that is culturally biased?

These examples of stereotyping accentuated by a society that supports and practices racial hegemony are very destructive for the future of African American youth (Ward, 2004). First, it leads to the assumption that all African Americans are a nuisance to society. African American children are led to believe that their cultural disposition, not their intellect, is the predictor of worldly success. This leads to a legacy of self-victimization which reinforces the cyclic nature of failure as a result of race (Brown, 1997). Finally, the humiliating and devaluing message is clear; you are black, your racial membership matters along with acceptance of alleged white superiority. As a result, self-esteem and identity development suffer drastically and achievement declines, as African American youth “absorb stereotypical images of Black Youth in popular culture and are reflecting those images” (Tatum, 1997, p. 60).

Figure 3

Review of Literature Concept Map.

Summary

It is alarming to learn that since the Federal Court actions to segregate schools and improve financial funding, African American students are still scoring below average on standardized test whereas more than eighty percent of their non-black counterparts are scoring at or above average (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). According to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a majority of the African American students are still testing below average in five out of seven areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Currently African American students are graduating from high school with what equals an eighth grade education while their white counterparts are testing on the early college level (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Therefore, understanding the school experiences of African American students is a concern that can not be ignored. The literature regarding the achievement, identity development, and educational experiences of African American students point to the need for a multi-dimensional conceptual framework deeply rooted within the foundations various theoretical orientations (See Figure 3).

In Chapter I, I set the context of this dissertation regarding personal narratives by exploring its value from a post-modern perspective. Then I explained my interest in democracy and social democracy by explaining why I chose this topic. I introduced the purpose of this study, exposed the problem, and presented the rationale for this type of qualitative inquiry. In closing that chapter, I displayed the research questions that guide this dissertation, defined key terms, and organized the remainder of this study.

This chapter began with the theoretical underpinnings of post-modernism that include cultural studies, critical race theory, and whiteness as the general lens of *explanation* needed to situate the experiences of African American and challenge the modernist assumptions related to achievement of black students. Next, this chapter introduces a conceptual framework, or a specific lens of *justification*, that guides this study toward a deeper understanding into the experiences of African American students. This framework includes a historical perspective of African Americans within the context of education, explores the importance of family heritage, investigates the role of cultural deficit theories, examines various aspects of identity development, the media's contribution to the development of a culture of anti-intellectualism among black youth, and finally the risk of stereotype threats.

In Chapter III, I will provide a rationale for situating the methodology within a qualitative research paradigm. I will describe the qualitative research paradigm along with the philosophical assumptions and ideological stances upon which this paradigm is situated. I will explain how I use the phenomenological tradition and social constructs of language that lead to the development of a narrative research design. Furthermore, in that chapter I will provide my own subjectivity and supply details regarding the research site, selection of participants, data collection and analysis procedures. I will end Chapter III by discussing the verification process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For Dewey, education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined. When one asks what it means to study education, the answer-in its most general sense-is to study experience...the study of education is the study of life...We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life from thinking about education.
(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxiii – xxiv)

The research technique presented in this study is based upon Dewey's (1922) perspective regarding the connection between education, experience, and life. For most of the twentieth century educational research has focused on standardized tests, statistics, and comparative analysis between these numbers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Little, if any, of this research has sought to explore the connection between things, people, and events, or the experiences linking these abstract terms. The methodological foundations of this inquiry is rooted within the social sciences and this body of knowledge's concern for the interaction between the socially constructed self and the socially constructed environment upon which the self develops. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding this connection between the self and the environment (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is based upon the post-modern assumption that life and education are inseparable.

When exploring the life and education of African American students, most research has sought to quantify this experience using standardized measures

(Montgomery, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). However, the purpose of this investigation is not to quantify the experiences of black students; rather it is to qualitatively explore the dynamic interaction between things, people, and events and its effect on identity development within the context of school from the perspective of the African American student.

In Chapter II, I situated the lenses, or perspectives, that direct this study. The lenses of which I speak were described within the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework found in that chapter. I viewed the theoretical orientation as a general lens of *explanation* needed to situate the experiences of African American and challenge the modernist assumptions related to the education, achievement, and identity of black students. Complementing this view is the conceptual framework, or a specific lens of *justification*, that guided my understanding into the experiences and academic identity of African American students.

The methodology used for this study is situated within the qualitative paradigm for research and design. In this chapter, I will present the rationale for choosing this tradition. I describe the qualitative paradigm, phenomenological tradition, and narrative research design. Next, I will seek to understand myself as the researcher. I conclude this chapter by providing details into the research site, selection of participants, and finally procedures for data collection and analysis.

In Chapter IV, I will provide the audience a glimpse into the identity portrait collaboratively created by the researcher and the participants of the study. I describe the participants using researcher notes and direct quotes. It will be an opportunity for the

audience to visualize how the collaboration between the researcher and informants evolves into a unique identity portrait.

Rationale

As discovered in the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework from Chapter II, the experiences and identity development of African American students is a complex phenomenon. Hence, the selection of a qualitative methodological design over a quantitative methodological design is preferable because of its appropriateness in intertwining personally lived experiences as an African American student with the theoretical and or social constructs of academic identity, educational experience, and achievement that could not be investigated adequately in any other research form.

The necessity of a qualitative design in this dissertation is best explained by Tyrone Howard (2003), professor of Urban Schooling, who recommends exploring this issue because of “the need for an insider’s level of school analysis” (p. 5). This design will allow participants to explore more about themselves, their achievement, and the schooling environment in which they must achieve. Therefore, subscribing to John Creswell’s (1998) framework to inquiry and design of qualitative research, this particular methodological design is appropriate because the research questions are centered in the “how” or “what” of a phenomenon. Additionally, there is a need to explore variables that affect the development of academic identity and achievement from an “insider’s” view. Finally, the problem lends itself to multiple approaches of inquiry.

I am interested in the experiences of African American students as they travel through school, and more specifically, how these experiences have affected the

development of identity within the context of school. Therefore, I have grounded my approach to inquiry and research design within the narrative framework because it will allow me, as the researcher, to explore a variety of perspectives “rich in context” regarding issues of “complexity and multiplicity” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006, p. 32). It is an approach to inquiry that moves the understanding of African American educational experiences and the development of academic identity beyond the positivist perspective and quantitative paradigm.

In opposition to the qualitative paradigm, the positivist perspective and quantitative paradigm seeks to quantify the experiences of black students. This approach to research produces controlled and predictable outcomes for a large sample of a population. It assumes that the experiences and identity development of African American students can be examined apart from the socially constructed educational context upon which they learn.

Since the study was not concerned with controlled and predictable outcomes, the positivist perspective and quantitative paradigm is not suitable for this inquiry which explores a complex social issue. The qualitative paradigm is used in this research project because, as a researcher, I am seeking a greater understanding and better description, not proving a point, into the educational experiences and academic identity of black students. It is a paradigm that limits the researcher’s voice and positions the voice of the participants and their experiences as the focal point of authority.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

According to Stake (1995) qualitative research is a process of interpretation. Hence, various scholars have conceptualized their own assumptions, definitions, and descriptions of the qualitative paradigm. Although providing a text-book definition of qualitative research isn't necessary, exploring the descriptions and characterizations of other scholars allows novice researchers the ability to explore the enormous conceptual boundaries of the qualitative paradigm (Hatch, 2002).

Sharan Merriam (1998) describes qualitative research as “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). William Pinar (1988), noted curriculum theorist, depicts qualitative research as a socially constructed relationship between thesis and anti-thesis firmly rooted in politics. Finally, Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research metaphorically “as a intricate fabric composed of many minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply” (p. 13).

Ultimately, Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as a:

[S]ituated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. . . At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.3)

Creswell (1998) provides a similar definition to qualitative research but emphasizes a more comprehensive exploration into the area of inquiry. Creswell writes:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

However, in understanding the qualitative paradigm, the most critical distinctions are understood in the differences between its competing paradigm, quantitative. The quantitative paradigm can be characterized as a research process embedded within the ideological perspective of modernism that shares numerous positivist's beliefs. In theory the paradigm works with few variables and many cases (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Contrary to this view on research, the qualitative paradigm can be described as a research process embedded within the ideological perspective of post-modernism while sharing postpositivist's beliefs. It is a paradigm that explores few cases with numerous and complex variables (Casey, 1995-96; Creswell, 1994, 1998; Guba, 1990; Hatch, 2002).

Creswell (1994, 1998) asserts that ideological perspectives guide all good qualitative research and include basic philosophical assumptions. I have already included the ideological perspectives that guide this particular study within the theoretical orientation presented in Chapter II. What I will present next is a brief discussion regarding the primary philosophical assumptions that mold the methodology of this study. These assumptions include ontological, epistemological, rhetorical, and methodological.

The ontological assumption presumes that multiple realities exist; and that these realities include those of the researcher, the participants, and ultimately those reading the study. It is a philosophical assumption that constructs various lenses upon which to view the phenomenon. The researcher's view is seen through the lens of his/her own socially constructed beliefs and values regarding the area of inquiry separate from those of the participant. The participants have their own view that is seen through a lens of personally lived experiences and socially constructed perceptions that are unique to the area of investigation. Finally, the audience's view is seen through a lens of reality upon which they, as the reader, must interpret the study. In order to provide quality research and successfully complete the venture within the qualitative paradigm these various realities, or lenses, must be concurrently reported from all perspectives (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002). In selecting the methodology for this dissertation, it is my belief that various lenses of explanation are needed when exploring the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students.

The epistemological assumption infers that there is a distinct relationship between the researcher and the participants of the study. Qualitative researchers see this as a positive aspect of the research process and seek to lessen the distance between researcher and participant while using the relationship as an opportunity to build collaboration (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002). The collection strategies, analysis, and ultimately the final product will in many instances reflect this collaboration between researcher and participant.

The rhetorical assumption concludes that there is a distinct language used in qualitative inquires, language that is unique to the qualitative tradition being used to construct the conceptual framework of the study. Creswell (1998) states that the “language of qualitative studies becomes personal, literary, and based on definitions that evolve during the study” (p. 77). Therefore, the emergence of certain literary forms will depend on the qualitative tradition used in the study.

The methodological assumption then is the construction of a method that is congruent with and interlaces the ontological, epistemological, and rhetorical assumptions. In the qualitative paradigm it is a methodology that is opposite of the tightly controlled and manipulative experiments associated with the quantitative paradigm and positivist beliefs. The research process begins inductively then moves toward deductive reasoning before developing the methodological design (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 2002).

The qualitative methodology for this study stems from the philosophical assumptions and ideological stances of post-modernism (Casey, 1993; Casey, 1995-96; Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002). This study describes the experiences and identity development of African American students through their school years. Examining these stories of African American students will add to the body of knowledge that characterizes the chronic underachievement of blacks through standardized measures and will assist in the improving of teaching and learning practices that guide current Eurocentric curriculums.

Phenomenological Tradition

John Creswell (1998), in his book regarding qualitative research and design, offers five traditions upon which to ground qualitative inquiry. The five traditions are biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. I accept that the qualitative paradigm in its most simplistic form is about understanding the world from the perspective of those living in it and how they construct meaning as participants in that world (Hatch, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My research interest for this study is in exploring the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students and how “meaning” is developed between the self and experience. Therefore, the methodological approach for this study is framed within the qualitative tradition of phenomenology.

According to Creswell (1998) “a phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). This tradition is grounded in the works of Edmund Hesserl, a German philosopher and mathematician, and his research in the phenomenological philosophy during the early parts of the twentieth century. It explores how the human consciousness makes sense of the world through historical, cultural, and social lenses. It is considered as a descriptive research process that deals with the outward appearance and inner consciousness of an individual based on personally lived experiences (Creswell, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Evan-Everett, 2000). It places at the center of inquiry the meaning individuals give to socially constructed events (Hatch, 2002).

In a series of papers presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Tesch (cited in Evans-Everett, 2000) describes this qualitative research tradition as:

[P]robes into the human experience to illuminate the complexity of individual perception. Phenomenological research consists of three types of questions. These include basic inner processes experienced by everyone as some point in life: experiences believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena of our time; and changes or transitions that are very common or of special importance. (p. 53)

This definition coincides with Edmund Husserl's original view of phenomenology as a philosophical approach to the *intentionality of consciousness* which assumes that one's perceptions of an external object is an intentional inner reflection of one's previous experience with that object (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). It assumes that in order for the researcher to gain a more knowledgeable understanding regarding certain perceptions of an individual(s) who have experienced a phenomenon, he/she must go directly to those individual(s) who are currently living or have lived that experience. According to Bekesi (cited in Evans-Everett, 2000), a more simplistic view of phenomenology "opens up possibilities for an alternative conception of the subject and of reason - a conception which wants to restore the importance of everyday experiences and daily life practices" (p.54).

In this research, I explore the educational experiences of African American students and examine how their perceptions of reality have affected identity development and their experiences within the context of school; therefore, the phenomenological research tradition is appropriate for the exploration into the *intentionality of*

consciousness as described by Husserl. This approach provides various perspectives regarding the African American experience within an educational context. Through interviews I am able to see how black students construct the reality of their educational experience within the socially constructed context upon which they are required to learn. I realize that as I move forward in the research process the greatest challenge for me as a researcher is what Husserl labeled as *bracketing*. In many regards this is a suspension of any preconceived judgments related to the phenomenon so that the experiences of the participants from their perspective can be fully understood (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002).

Social Constructs of Language

Bekesi (cited in Evans-Everett, 2000) indicates that the phenomenological perspective connects the intellect and experience while providing open spaces for the understanding of “every day experiences and daily life practices” (p. 54). Nonetheless, the social constructs of language are very important in understanding the schooling experiences of African American students. From the perspective of this researcher there is a connection between the social constructs of language and phenomenology.

Phenomenology explores how the human consciousness makes sense of the world through historical, cultural, and social lenses. Ultimately, how one expresses this view of the human consciousness from multiple perspectives is through the use of language. As Evans-Everett (2000) states “since all cultural production is rooted in language, according to Hesserl, what matters is the subjective consciousness, there is an overlapping with the

utterances which create language at the root and the subjective experiences emerging from its foundation” (p.51).

Language is a powerful expression that emerges through the construction of meaning during an experience as the participant persuades his/her audience of authenticity. As we learn from Catherine Riessman (1993), researcher of interrupted narratives, places and events do not tell the story, people do. This representation and interpretation of the story is exhibited through the purposeful selection and well planned form of language. Language is “not nearly a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life. . . [It is a] means by which identities may be fashioned” and meaning is assigned within a social context (Rosenwald & Ochsberg, 1992, p.1). It is a part of reality that participants do not use language to describe a hypothetical world, but instead use language to present an interpretation of the reality of their world. It allows participants to connect past experiences to the present and display this understanding in form of a “voice.”

Focus of this Study

The focus of this dissertation is the experiences and identity development of black students as they travel through the socially constructed context of schooling. I am interested in how African American students construct meaning from these experiences in regards to identity development. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How do African American students at a small rural high school describe their schooling experience?

2. How do African American students in a small rural high school view their academic ability, potential, and performance?
3. Who and/or what do they perceive has had the greatest influence in the formation of the academic identity of African American students who attend Horace Mann High School?
4. What is the relationship between academic identity, educational experiences, and/or achievement of these African American students?

Subscribing to John Creswell's (1998) perspective that qualitative research is a "complex, holistic picture," it is critical that the methodology chosen for this study mirrors that same holistic view. This holistic view should take the researcher and his/her audience into "the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity" (p. 15). This view should allow the participants to construct their own meaning about the world through intellect, experience, and language.

For this dissertation the methodological research design used is narrative. The reason behind choosing this particular methodology is because narrative research explores the "ways that human beings make meaning through language" (Casey, 1995-96, p. 212). It merges phenomenology with the social constructs of language to produce a deeper understanding into the educational experiences and identity development of African American students. Understanding these experiences and this development of the self within the context of school is the first step to improving the teaching and learning practices of public school institutions.

Narrative Research

Narrative research is the exploration of lived experiences through the gathering and interpreting of personal stories. As noted by Kathleen Casey, professor and researcher of narrative studies, numerous authors have worked within the domain of narrative research to develop a broad conceptual framework that encompasses life writing, documents of life, life stories, life histories, ethnohistory, personal narratives, autoethnographies, personal accounts, autobiographies and biographies, and finally narrative interviews (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Denzin, 1989; Lancy, 1993; Personal Narrative Group, 1989; Popular Memory Group, 1982; Plummer, 1983; Quantz, 1992; Smith, 1994; as cited in Casey, 1995-96, p. 211). All of the categorical forms that are part of this very broad conceptual framework are based on the premise that narrative research is how an individual makes sense of his/her life through the telling of stories.

In keeping with the qualitative tradition of phenomenology, and the social constructs of language narrative research design, is “the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” through the exploration and understanding of the “voice” (Casey, 1993; Polkingorne, 1988, p. 1). Narratives are a way in which individuals communicate their personally lived experiences. Narratives are also a way of representing the self (Goffman, 1959). The meaning that individuals assign to these personally lived experiences and representation of the self is constructed and displayed through language. Jerome Burner (1986), theorist in educational psychology, emphasizes this displaying of experience through language as a natural cognitive function that includes a distinct way “of ordering experience” and “of constructing reality” (p.11).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988), a French phenomenologist and author of *The Structure of Behavior*, adds this regarding the importance of language:

Our linguistic ability enables us to descend into the realm of our primary perceptual and emotional experience, to find there a reality susceptible to verbal understanding, and to bring forth a meaningful interpretation of this primary level of our existence...By finding meaning in experience and then expressing this in words, the speaker enables the community to think about experience and not just live it. (p. 29-30)

Sigrun Gudmundsdottir (cited in McIntosh, 2004), professor and narratologist at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, asserts that these constructed narratives tell a story of “who we are and where we are heading in life” (p. 50). This mode of inquiry displays through language how participants experience the world and what values and beliefs guide the construction of their own reality. The focal point of inquiry is the story that is communicated through the personal narratives (Casey, 1993; Reissman, 1993). According to Donald Polkinghorne (1997), professor of Counseling Psychology at the University of Southern California, narrative is a type of literary analysis that presents “the discourse form which can express the diachronic perspective of human actions. It retains their temporal dimension by exhibiting them as occurring before, at the same time, or after other actions or events” (p. 9). This coincides with Burner (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000), and Casey’s (1995-96) argument that time is an essential element in the structuring of personal narratives. Narratives cannot be structured outside their three-dimensional space of time, place, and event upon which they have been socially constructed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative research methodology was chosen for this dissertation because of its interdisciplinary approach to understanding the human experience. This methodology encompasses aspects of history, literary theory, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies (Casey, 1993, 1995-96; Polkinghorne, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Narrative research merges elements from these fields to construct a collection of experiences in the form of participant's dialogue that is created within the structure of the research approach. This collection of experience is based on both an individual and collective "understanding of the speaker's self" (Casey, 1995-96, p. 213). Casey (1993) contends:

[W]e continually make judgments on what we see or hear; we make sense through a process of selection and rejection. And what we select and reject very much depends on who we are, who is speaking to us, what they say, how they say it, where and when we are listening. (p.7)

This continual process of selecting and rejecting ultimately develops into a text. A text from the narrative perspective can be a story, a conversation, a photograph, personal memorabilia, or other types of artifacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Hatch, 2002). For the purpose of this study the text consists of the stories disclosed by the African American participants during their interviews regarding their experiences in school. According to Kathleen Casey (1993, 1995-96) every text has context. That is, the participant's perspective is constructed and reconstructed within a much larger worldly perspective. Makhail Bakhtin (1981), Russian philosopher and literary scholar, indicates that:

[T]he living utterance, having take meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in the social dialogue. (p. 276)

For example, one female African American participant shares the context in which she views the academic ability or achievement of black students.

Sometimes it seems like people associate black people and their academic abilities not being that great like they are slower, they don't want to do work because they're lazy or stuff like that. . . A lot of times it seems like that people... [Pause] like the black females are more motivated, do better in school and that black males. I don't know why. It seems like that but I don't want to stereotype or anything but that's something that I get off of some people. (Interview with Melanie)

Intertextuality seeks to develop themes by connecting various texts from complementary and contrasting perspectives. For example, the impact of school culture can be compared or contrasted across individual texts. The following participants discuss school culture from a similar perspective. Both participants believed the culture of Horace Mann provided a more positive educational experience than other predominately black schools.

I'm really glad I came to Horace Mann. If I went to. . . [Pause] that if I went to Athens Drive, Moore Square, Panther Creek, or Millbrook, I would not be going to college. I would not be going to college. I would probably be a teenage mom or probably not doing anything in life. . . [Pause] It is just an influence. The influence that your student body has over you. They can drag you through the mud and they can raise you up as high as you can be but they influence you a lot. (Interview with Jazmine)

I mean, when you're a black student I say that when you're in a black school and the teachers and the principal and stuff, I mean they take it easier on you. I feel like they take it easier on you. . . Like at a black school, it's always competition. You got black kids its always going to be drama everywhere you go. . . I think it was a better period for me coming in here...I feel like the different variety, like the different cultures here. . . I think this was a major difference in my learning and probably other peoples learning. (Interview with Winton)

Selectivity is what a participant chooses to include. Opposite of selectivity is silence or what a participant chooses to exclude. This is evident in the interview with an African American male student who was speaking about his parent's separation. This student began to speak about this difficult time in his life and abruptly changed direction with is story.

I had a little brother too and he didn't really understand it and I can see like why and everything, and saw everything up close and personal and then it kind of messed. . . [Pause] Then I had to switch schools in the sixth grade and I went to Heritage Middle School and I finished sixth grade there and then that's when I came to Carnage Middle School my seventh grade year. (Interview with Gerran)

A slippage is an accidental inclusion or contraction within a text. "I was interested in running track but I never did. I like poetry. Nobody really knows that I like poetry. . . [Smiling]" (Interview with Da-Juan). Although Da-Juan acknowledged being interested in something that would be consider non-masculine by his peers he quickly wanted to remind me that no else really knew that about him. I could tell by his body language and his quick remark after his admittance that he was a little bit uncomfortable about sharing this with me.

In the end, narrative research infers that people speak and act in patterned ways, the stories they construct inform us about the nature of reality regarding the world upon

which they live (Casey, 1993, 1995-96). According to the Popular Memory Group cited in Casey, 1995-96):

Every narrative is a highly constructed text structured around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity. The principal value of narrative is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories and with selectivities, silences, and slippages that are intrinsic to its representation of reality. (p. 234)

Employing narrative research as the methodological approach for this dissertation, I accept that some scholars subscribe to the positivist beliefs and may consider this approach to research as weak or “soft,” offering very little “hard” or quantitative evidence; their main argument is that it doesn’t significantly “prove” anything in the quest for ultimate “Truth.” Nonetheless, according to Tesch (cited in Evans-Everett, 2000) some “scholars are becoming aware of the value of such [qualitative] data and efforts are being made to devise ways in which information that cannot be captured in numbers can be translated into knowledge” (p.45). After all “meaning is ambiguous” and “[a]ll we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15).

The Popular Memory Group (1982) along with other scholars who support the postpositivist belief for this type of textual [or narrative] data and nonlinear analysis argue that quantitative inquiry is highly controlled and manipulative and is “wholly mistaken” because “choosing professional procedures and canons of objectivity” limits the potential of understanding the complexities of the human experience (Casey, 1993, p.12). In the end, those who support the positivist paradigm to research design attempt to

hide researcher subjectivity, ignoring the relationship between researcher and participant, while simply displaying the basic facts (Casey, 1993; Casey, 1995-96; Riessman, 1993).

In choosing this method, I challenge the positivist view of thinking believing the researcher should not simply be the “bearer of the scientific canon and the cultural determinations” (Casey, 1993, p. 12). I believe that this methodology affords African Americans students the opportunity to use their own language and construction of reality to speak as a “voice.” It is a very critical methodological approach when studying those who have been marginalized. Gloria Ladson-Billing’s (1994) states “the story has gained credence as an appropriate methodology for transmitting the richness and complexity of cultural and social phenomena” that surrounds black underachievement (p. x).

Although the narrative approach to inquiry has become increasing popular within the last two decades, exploring the “stories” or “voices” of African American students in narrative form is still very limited. The number of studies that explore these experiences of black students has failed to grow in popularity with the methodological design. This is obviously quite discouraging because at the center of the alleged underachievement and distorted identity development of African American students is clearly the story of the black child.

Noticeably, the number of narrative studies within the context of education is on the rise. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) in her work *Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* conducted an investigation that explored the educational differences in teaching black students using narratives of teachers. In keeping with the theme of exploring narratives from the teacher perspective Michele

Foster (1997) in her book *Black Teachers on Teaching* investigates how the teaching profession has been experienced and perceived by African American teachers.

However, there is a shift occurring in the type of narratives studies that are being conducted within the context of education. The move is displaying a shift from teacher narrative to student narrative. In the books *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* and *Sent to the Principal: Students Talk about Making High School Better*, Kathleen Cushman (2003; 2005) seeks the narrative of students in an effort to investigate how to improve school culture. However, still absent in this new focus of narratives within the educational context is the collective “voice” of African American students.

Clearly, using narrative methodology to explore the experiences of African American students is right for this study. Narrative has a unique ability to reveal how culture “speaks itself” and examine how “practices of power” silence the voices of some. Without a doubt the voices of African American students have been silent within the context of education (Riessman, 1993, p. 5).

Researcher as a Participant

Qualitative research is just as interested in the inner consciousness as it is in outward expressions of an experience (Hatch, 2002). This approach is very evident in the work of Alan Peshkin (1988) and his exploration of research subjectivity. Research subjectivity brings to the forefront the notion that scholarly work cannot exist apart from the researcher’s conscious lens of analysis. This lens of analysis carries to the research process one’s perspective that is heavily influenced by socially constructed values and

beliefs. As research is conducted the author cannot simply leave his/her perspective behind. As Peshkin (1988) notes “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (p. 17). There is a need to disclose one’s subjectivity as Hays (2004) asserts “because much of the collected data is analyzed through the researcher’s lens, the research needs to provide information concerning the researcher’s perspective and relationship to the case” (p. 223). Revealing this perspective for the reader is the first step in understanding the personal biases that guide the structuring of the research project.

Although I have worked hard to reduce my personal bias within this work, my goal is not to rid this study of my subjectivity, but rather find, embrace, and disclose to the reader my conscious lens of analysis. Therefore, the research process has evolved to create a joint relationship between “self and subject” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). I acknowledge then that I am a just as much a participant within this study as the research subjects.

It is evident that in every aspect of this research process, from the personal reflection, setting of the context, choice of study, theoretical orientation and conceptual framework, and to the choice of methodology, there is a reflection of my subjectivity. I also recognize that the remaining parts of this study will be constructed through and include the researcher’s lens of subjectivity. However, I feel like there is more to offer the readers of this study regarding my subjectivity other than what has already been displayed.

In order to improve the frame of reference regarding my subjectivities for the readers of this study, I feel compelled to include the lives of those who gave, reared, and ultimately influenced my life. It is believed that Charles Haley, American author and 1977 Pulitzer Prize winner, was once quoted as saying that “in every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future.” As I construct this bridge that unites “self” and “subject.” I’m reminded of the important role my family has played in shaping and directing who I am as a decision-maker.

I am convinced that my father, Billy, is one of the hardest working men living on the face of this earth. He is the epitome of Ecclesiastes 10:18, “If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.” In my opinion no one can match or question his over-enduring work ethic, loyalty, or sense of calling to provide for his wife and children. Childhood memories about my father involve either him being out of town for work or “tending” to the farmland he leased. My father spent a lot of time away from home, not in the sense of abandonment, but rather with the feeling that what he was involved in away from home improved the quality of home life. His job as a construction foreman for a local company forced him to travel most of his forty-five year career. If he wasn’t at work, he spent most of his free time cultivating and managing local farmland, a trade learned from his father.

My mother, Georgia, is a tenderhearted, compassionate and loving individual. Performing unselfish acts of kindness as a parent, she represented the true meaning of servitude. She is a living example of Matthew 7:12, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” I credit her

with teaching me that every person has his/her own unique story, and, regardless, of race or gender, no one should ever be denied their basic human rights. My mom has devoted her entire life to raising her three children, an endless task she continues to work at even as they, her children, enter adulthood and have children of their own. She always searched for the teachable moment helping us find true meaning in every eventful circumstance.

I have acquired from my parents a core value system that embraces life-long learning as its primary principle. This is evident in examining the last six years of my career in which I have been granted a Master's in Education, have become a National Board Certified Teacher, and have nearly completed a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. Acquiring the motivation to become a life-long learner as a core principle in my life has led me on an educational journey of self-discovery. It has encouraged me to become more aware of and strengthen the connection between my "real" self (who I am) and my "ideal" self (who I want to become). I believe that my parents instilled this value of life-long learning in me, hoping to provide an opportunity for me to become excited and energized about future possibilities - possibilities they lost out on as children; possibilities gained by developing and sharing one's own experience.

I went to a very small elementary school located in the southern part of the county. At that time the culture of the school was very mundane. The classrooms along with the rest of school environment were identical from one year to the next: white, middle class. There was very little discussion or celebration regarding diversity.

As I entered middle school, academic struggles began to mount. Although academic work was stressed at school, other priorities moved to the top of the list while at home. There were chores to perform and trips to the farm every evening. I was expected to work to learn and learn while I worked.

Nonetheless, my work in the classroom was exceeded by all of my peers. Most of my middle school educational experience could be characterized by parent conferences, mediocre grades, and trips to the principal's office. There appeared to be no progress or improvement in sight. I met minimal standards and would be pushed to the next grade year after year. I simply slid under the radar of those at the control tower who monitored the flights of our daily educational journey. The teachers continued to fail and make a connection with me in the classroom. Or, on the other hand, one might say that I failed to make a connection with school. Not only did I fail to impress the school but more significantly the school failed to be impressed with me.

Motivated to prove wrong all of those who had taught me, I applied and by the grace of God gained acceptance to the local university. What would I do in college? What would I study? That's when I first felt the calling to become a teacher. I felt a strong sense of urgency to learn about becoming an educator with the hopes of improving the quality of an educational experience that I had disconnected with as a child. After all I had spent the last thirteen years in a school environment; what difference would another four make. In college the desire to make teaching a career continued to grow as I learned from my classmates and instructors. Eventually, I graduated and accepted a job at a local middle school.

Somewhere after the first four years of my teaching career I lost sight of direction and purpose. How could that happen at such an early stage in my career? I contribute this feeling of purposelessness to my work environment. I had become all too familiar with my surroundings and complacent performing my job. As Buckley (cited in Brubaker, 2004) suggested, “Boredom is the deadliest poison, and this is a truism that it strikes hardest at the most comfortable” (p. 57). The sense of challenge often associated with being a novice teacher had gone. The expectations for teaching ninth grade physical education were minimal. If you could just “keep the little darlings out of the office” you were doing your job. No one really cared what you were doing with your class. After all it was just freshman physical education. The fire that burns within was slowly losing its flicker.

Shortly thereafter, I changed schools and accepted a new challenge. The desire and enjoyment to perform my job began to burn once again. Only this time I began to wonder whose wood I was burning that made the flame. Since my first year of college I had always wanted to work within the field of education. Without question I knew I was fulfilling my destiny. Doing what I was created to do, educate others! Still, something wasn’t right.

In an attempt to search for what wasn’t right, I entered the Ed.D. program at a local university. I entered with lots of questions about the existing state and current structure of the American public education system. I learned about democratic education and schools as agents for social change. I was introduced to cultural studies, queer theory, critical pedagogy, moral imperatives, ethical dilemmas, and postpositivist

thinking. I believed that at the heart of each educational experience is the process of reflection; a “process of interpretation” where meaningful discoveries occur developing a relationship between the “self” and “subject.” James B. Macdonald (1988) has this to say about the understanding the relationship between the self and subject:

The fundamental human quest is the search for meaning and the basic human capacity for this search is experienced in the hermeneutic process, the process of interpretation of the text [or subject]. This is the search for greater understanding that motivates and satisfies us. . . The act of theorizing is an act of faith, a religious act. . . It is an expression of the humanistic vision in life. (pp. 105,110)

Ultimately, then, I believe that my interests in studying the experiences of African American students is related to the “fundamental human quest” to search for meaning. By including my subjectivity I realize that part of this quest includes the search for meaning of my own educational experiences.

In the end, I subscribe to the understanding that “the many and diverse ways of looking at life around us are a reality to those who hold them” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 38). I realize then that we author our own life, we create our own curriculum. As an educator, teacher, and leader my natural instinct is to influence others in the development of their curriculum, in essence, to be a co-author. I enter this research with caution, knowing that I must allow others to become their own life-authors.

Anonymity

To provide an environment that would allow the sixteen African American students to feel comfortable where they could speak openly and share their experiences, anonymity was assured. Parents and participants were provided this assurance in writing

through the consent and assent forms to act as a human subject. Participants were reminded again of this assurance verbally prior to the interview. Each participant in this study will be referenced by a pseudonym. The names of schools, school districts, geographical directions, and identities of others spoken about by the participants have been concealed as well with fictitious names. Although protecting a participant's identity can hide other pieces of information that may provide greater insight into understanding the phenomenon being investigated, one cannot underestimate the value of assured anonymity.

Research Site

The setting for this research project is Horace Mann, a small rural high school located in the Southeast. Horace Mann High School is situated just outside the city limits of Huntersville and is part of the Cash County School District. This school is one of 26 high school options within the district. Prior to their ninth grade year, rising freshmen from within the county may apply to attend any of the various specialized academies located at different high schools across the school district. The academy at Horace Mann High School provides a rigorous college preparatory curriculum in three specialized areas.

Walden Pond community that surrounds Horace Mann High School is a small farming community. The school board representative for this high school has served in that capacity for nearly two decades. The Republican county commissioner that serves this community has gone without a challenge from his political party for almost a decade.

There are approximately 950 students in grades 9-12 who attend Horace Mann High School. The demographics for Horace Mann High School are 50% White, 43% African American, 3% Latino, 2% Asian, and 2% Native American. There are 309 students, or roughly 36% of the school population, who are eligible for free and reduced lunch. This particular school for the 2005-06 academic year boasted an average daily attendance rating above 96%, the best for traditional high schools within the school district. It also met 16 out of 17 Adequate Yearly Progress goals.

The attendance zone for Horace Mann High School includes Walden Pond community, the southern edges of Huntersville, and portions of western Jonesborough. Many of the students that attend Horace Mann from both Huntersville and Jonesborough live in subsidized housing communities that have been recently built by those respective cities within the last five years.

There are 75 certified staff members that work at Horace Mann High School. There are 3 African American male and 6 African American female certified staff members. The certified staff members include teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators. There is one female certified staff member of Middle-Eastern ethnicity. Other than what has been described there are no other certified staff members from a different minority or ethnic group. In the non-certified category there are two African American males who work the evening shift as custodians. There are no females or males from different minority or ethnic groups that work as support staff members during the early shift or in the front office.

Horace Mann High School is in the middle of internal and external structural changes. Externally the school is currently under a multi-million dollar renovation to handle the projected increase in enrollment over the next five years. Internally the school is adopting a reform model mandated by the State Board of Education for all high schools whose composite score is below sixty percentile mark. The principal is currently beginning his second year as the leader of the school and is working on restructuring the leadership team and developing professional learning communities.

I specifically chose this school because the school's student demographics are slowly changing to non-white majority and as a faculty member of this school I have a personal investment. Examining a four-year trend of EOC scores had indicated that the African American sub-group has the lowest performing composite score when compared to other sub-groups at the state and district level, and although the African American sub-group accounts for 33% of the student body population at this high school, they are responsible for nearly 60% of the In-School Suspension discipline referrals and nearly 70% of the Out of School Suspension referrals.

Selection of Participants

Although many students, regardless of race or ethnicity, will provide valuable insight into the research of educational experiences and identity development, I chose to explore these issues as they specifically relate to African American students because historically African Americans have been characterized as an oppressed and marginalized segment of society. Statistics have shown that even when controlled for variables associated with socioeconomic status, African American students' standardized

achievement levels is far behind their white classmates, and the recommendation in scholarly journals to explore the perceptions of African American students has increased in popularity.

Therefore, this dissertation explores the educational experiences and academic identity of sixteen African American students who currently attend Horace Mann High School. Selecting participants is a very critical step in qualitative research because there is a need to have a “clear criteria in mind” and the researcher needs “to provide rationales for their decisions.” Criterion sampling works well for phenomenological studies because it assures that all participants have experienced “the phenomenon being studied” (Creswell, 1998, p. 118). For this study, participants, eight males and eight females, had to be full-time African American students in the twelfth grade who currently attend Horace Mann High School. Next, participants had to meet all graduation requirements and be cleared for graduation by the principal in June of 2006. Finally, participants needed to be willing to share their experiences or “stories.”

The criterion-based selection process was grounded by the following assumptions of the researcher. First, I felt it was extremely important that all participants be in the twelfth grade because it is a milestone that signifies the end of their adolescent educational journey. Choosing students who were in lower grades could have an effect on the “depth” and “richness” of data collection because there were more experiences left as a student within the context of education. It is my belief that senior students would more aware of their academic identity and have a clearer picture of their educational experiences. Secondly, because I work at the research site as a teacher and administrative

intern, I feel that is extremely important to minimize any risks felt by the participants associated with power in the relationship between the researcher, subject, and research site. In order to minimize the risks associated with power for the participants and to aid in the establishment of an open environment, participants needed have meet all graduation requirements and be cleared to graduate by the principal. Third, I believed that students must be willing to share their experiences and “stories.” I did not seek narratives of African Americans students from one particular perspective. As a result of the criteria-based selection process the narratives I collected reflected a variety of home life experiences, academic achievement levels, socioeconomic statuses, and educational experiences from both rural, urban, and private school settings.

The selection process continued with what Kathleen deMarrais (2004), professor and researcher in the foundations of qualitative research, refers to as network selection. I sought nominations of black students who would fit the criteria from African American teachers and guidance counselors at the research site. This was an extremely helpful technique because as it turned out, the African American teachers and guidance counselors had an insider’s level of information that was not afforded to everyone who worked on staff at Horace Mann. Many of the black students at this school in most cases had adopted these particular staff employees as surrogate family members. These staff members were functioning under the African American interpretive tradition of “fictive kin.” They were part of a larger family and social network of community that provided parenting support (Evans-Everett, 2000; Jarrett, 1994).

The network selection process then enabled me to utilize a third sampling strategy known as snowballing or chaining as identified by Miles and Huberman (1994). This approach allowed me to use participants of the study to locate other possible participants who meet the criteria selected for this study.

Once potential participants had been identified through the above processes, I met with students individually and in some cases in group settings. These meetings were very informal and served as a mode to introduce myself and the purpose of the study. Horace Mann is a relatively small high school and although I have prior knowledge of these students through casual encounters in hallway or because they are students I have taught, there is still much I do not know regarding their personal narratives. I received positive input from all participants with no one declining to participation. This eagerness to become participants and contribute their narratives is obviously a positive aspect in research design (Delpit, 2003). Kathleen deMarrais (2004) asserts:

They, too, may get a sense of satisfaction from participating in a study that leads to increased knowledge. They may also benefit from the experiences of having someone to listen to and appreciate their views or their experiences. They may also benefit from building a relationship with the researcher. (p. 61)

As suggested by Sharan Merriam (1998), the selection of participants is nonrandom, purposeful and small. Exploring the narratives of African American students would not allow for a large sample of subjects. Also, considering the time constraints for examining the complexities of each individual narrative and the need to explore this perspective in more depth, a small sample of subjects is suitable for this research design. Therefore, I chose sixteen participants because it allowed me, the researcher, to go more

in-depth, as I explored their educational experiences and identity development of black students. deMarrais (2004) states, “Fewer participants interviewed in greater depth usually generates the kinds of understanding qualitative researchers seek” (p. 61). Each narrative then becomes a unique story where these African American students add to a cultural framework of meaning regarding the black experience and identity development within an educational context.

Data Collection and Analysis

I began the collection and analysis process by exploring the field of narrative research. I added a graduate course titled *Narrative of the Self* to my Ed.D. plan of study while simultaneously beginning to read a variety of narrative inquiries. As I became more familiar with this approach to collection and analysis, I started to narrow the scope of narrative studies to that which explored an African American perspective. I examined these narrative studies for research design paying particular attention to the collection and analysis process, underling metaphors and themes, and ultimately the development of a cultural framework of meaning.

I next began my role as a participant observer. Although this role is typically used in ethnographic research, it is a widely acceptable role in any form of qualitative research tradition (Gause, 2001). John Creswell (1998) indicates the participant observer is a researcher that immerses oneself in the day-day activities of those under investigation. The researcher explores the meaning behind “what people do, what they say,. . . as well as what they make or use” (p. 59). According to Morris Zelditch Jr. (cited in Gause, 2001), professor of Sociology at Stanford University, there are three modes to

participant observation. They are the “enumeration to document frequency data; participant observation to describe incidents; and informant interviewing to learn institutionalized norms and statuses” (p. 66).

My role as a participant observer along with the remaining parts of the data collection process expanded over a seven-month period. During this time I fulfilled my obligations as teacher and administrative intern. Serving in this capacity afforded me the opportunity to examine the various “stories” that these participants were constructing within a variety of contexts. I spent time monitoring these participants’ interaction between faculty members as well as their peers within an educational setting. In addition to studying them within an educational context, I was able to monitor their interactions with others outside of school. I had the opportunity to examine personal artifacts or what John Creswell (1998) refers to as “what they make or use” (p. 59).

While serving as a participant observer, I began to conduct interviews. As emphasized by the phenomenological tradition, the interviews were conducted individually (Evans-Everett, 2000). The interview is the favorite tool of inquiry for qualitative researchers exploring social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews can be an important avenue in gathering information as Stake (1995) describes interviewing as an opportunity to “obtain the description and interpretations of others.” It provides the researcher with a tool for “discovering and portraying the multiple views” and is considered “the main road to multiple realities”, or perspectives (p. 64).

There are many different approaches to qualitative interviewing which include structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. Although exploring the various different approaches to qualitative interviewing is beyond the scope of this study, I do include several commonalities of various approaches to interviewing that, coupled with the qualitative paradigm and narrative research methods, led to the development of an interview protocol.

First, qualitative interviewing is synonymous to that of a casual conversation. The researcher assumes the role of an active-listener instinctively manipulating the conversation, choosing when to probe and when to focus the dialogue on an area of interest exploring for more details (Elliott, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Next, qualitative interviewing is conducted to explore the vast complexity of the human experience. Therefore, it is not guided by the objective positivist perspective regarding people and events as observed in quantitative methods (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 1991). Finally, qualitative interviewing is a shared conversation between researcher and participant with no apparent hierarchical structure. That is no one actually in control of the conversation. It creates a comfortable atmosphere where the participant can tell a “story” or construct “reality” (Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Although there is no one correct interviewing technique to use for qualitative research, I chose the semi-structured approach for its appropriateness for this particular inquiry. I chose this technique because in connecting the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework of this study with the phenomenological tradition and purpose of

this work, the semi-structured interviewing approach appeared to suit the methodological design needs of this dissertation.

The semi-structure technique balances the relationship between the researcher and participant. The researcher generally begins with a very broad, open-ended question like “Tell me about your experience in school.” Then the researcher provides room for the participant to construct his/her response with either generalities or specifics. Next, the researcher responds to the participant with probes, searching for greater detail or an in-depth conversation regarding a topic of interest (Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A benefit of the semi-structure interview is that it provides the researcher with an opportunity and flexibility to explore an array of topics with more than one participant using the same protocol (Potter & Wetherell, 1995).

For this study the semi-structure interview protocol was specifically designed to be a very broad, open-ended question that would allow for the telling of a “story.” The interview began with the primary question of, “Tell me about your experience as an African American student growing up through school?” As suggested by Mishler (cited in Elliott, 2005) the goal of the interview should be to “stimulate the interviewee’s interpretative capacities” and that the interviewer should “activate narrative production by indicating-even suggesting-narrative positions, resources, and orientations, and precedents” (p. 22). This focus was accomplished through research probes or naturally occurring points of reference that are associated with the main area of inquiry (See Appendix A for complete research protocol).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in one-hour sessions over a three month period. As suggested by Seidman (1991) a second shorter interview session was utilized with each participant as new information that emerged led to further interview probes. Before beginning the research process, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board. Then, prior to conducting the interviews, I gained consent by acquiring signatures on both the assent and consent forms. The digital recordings and transcripts of the interviews are being kept in a locked box to protect anonymity of all the participants.

The interviews were held in various locations throughout the school. Prior to each interview session, there was dialogue between the researcher and participant that led to a mutually agreed upon date, time and place for the concurring interview. After each interview I made researcher notes in a journal describing the student and his/her body language, tone, and overall perception of the constructed story.

Once the interviews were complete I began the transcription process using voice recognition software. As Catherine Riessman (1993) explains, this is a very important step in the between the collection and analysis process because “transforming spoken language into a written text is now taken quite seriously because thoughtful investigators no longer assume the transparency of language” (p. 12). Although transcribing does not provide the most accurate “picture of reality,” it does provide some resemblance when it includes pauses, inflections, emphases, unfinished sentences, short periods (Riessman, 1993).

Catherine Reissman (1993) also states that narrative analysis is a “systemic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active

subjects” (p.70). Analyzing the narratives is a crucial step in the understanding of the research topic, basically it is the putting together of individual impressions or responses into a meaningful conclusion that is beneficial to the audience (Stake, 1995). In qualitative research the analysis process involves identifying themes, reducing the data, and coding the interviews correctly (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Seidman, 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1984). There were two levels of analysis for this study: first was individual analysis followed by collective analysis.

I began the initial analysis process by “reading” the narratives during the very first week of data collection. During this phase of analysis I began to “read” or “listen” to the data that had been collected (Maxwell, 2005). This “rough” analysis gave me the opportunity to write notes regarding what I saw and/or heard initially in the data. I began to develop tentative ideas regarding relationships and categories. This “rough” analysis also served to simulate the analytical thinking process that guided the categorizing and connecting strategies.

This analytical process included exploring the data for individual metaphors, experiences, and chronologies and by comparing and contrasting patterns in the form of a collective voice. I looked for patterns within their narratives. After this “rough” analysis, I began the formal phase of data analysis on both individual and collective levels by using the constant comparative method (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). This method assumes “that the data collection and analysis are recursive, one informing the other throughout the course of the study” (Howard, 2003, p.7). As Merriam (1998) asserts, this involves comparing one segment of a narrative from different data collection

modes (i.e. interviews, observations, or researcher notes) to another segment of a narrative within the same or different data collection mode. This formal analysis phase of data analysis is also referred to as coding (Maxwell, 2005).

This formal data analysis phase begins with a strategy known as categorizing. This process involves unitizing the data or developing chunks of meaning within the narrative related to the researcher's focus of inquiry (Maxwell, 2005). This unitizing was accomplished by using different colored highlighters to mark various chunks of meaning. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), highlighting the "chunks" will serve as the foundation for developing broader categories of information later in the analysis process. A list of data "chunks" can be found in Appendix B. The utilizing technique produces small pieces of information that can stand or be "fractured" from narrative. These "fractured" pieces of data can then be rearranged into larger categories to make comparison during connection phase easier (Maxwell, 2005). The goal of each unit is to provide an understanding for the researcher to determine what chunks of meaning need to be taken forward to the next level of analysis.

Next, the smaller "fractured" pieces of information are transferred from the unitizing process based on similar themes or meanings into larger groupings. Catherine Riessman (1993) refers to this as "reducing the data." Richard Hoffman considers these larger categories developed from the reduction process as "thinking units" (Gause, 2001). The "thinking units" were triangulated from the different data collection modes on an individual and collective level of analysis. Hence, the data was collected, analyzed, and re-analyzed to identify reoccurring themes across individual and group narratives.

Therefore, the narrative responses were dissected to reveal consistencies in theme, metaphors, ideas, and chronologies.

The final stage in this formal data analysis process is using connecting strategies. Connecting “attempts to understand the data (usually, but not necessarily, an interview transcript or other textual material) in context, using various methods to identify the relationships among the different elements of the text” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 98). An example of this analysis process then is to compare these findings to the theoretical orientation, conceptual framework, and research questions that guided the development of this study.

Once formal analysis was complete, a meeting was established with the participants to verify themes and responses during member checking. Once the member check was complete, the themes were taken to both an African American colleague and department advisor for a peer debriefing session.

Validity

Validation is a key element in any qualitative research design. Validation seeks to answer the questions of legitimacy and believability regarding the study’s conclusion posed by its audience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). According to Catherine Riessman (1993), validation is a “process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations” (p. 65). Trustworthiness is concerned with developing a plausible relationship between the author’s conclusion and reality. It is inherently a process and not a concrete methodology (Maxwell, 2005). The fundamental goal of validation for qualitative research is in establishing “trustworthiness” between the

researcher and his/her audience and not in finding the ultimate “Truth.” The difference in these two terms is found within the ideological stances that guide positivist and postpositivist thinking.

As mentioned, establishing trustworthiness is a key concern for the verification of any qualitative research project (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). John Creswell (1998) advocates for the use of at least two forms of trustworthiness but indicates that the more techniques of trustworthiness practiced by the researcher the more this verification process will bring creditability to the study. Triangulation, intertextuality, member checking, and peer debriefing were all utilized in an effort to enhance trustworthiness of this study.

Triangulation allows the researcher to “gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues” being investigated (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94-95). It incorporates the collection of narratives or texts from multiple sources that may fill a void left by one solitary source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulating the data is the qualitative researcher most effective strategy in developing creditability and defending charges of subjectivity by determining if the same conclusion could be drawn from a variety of sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). For this study narratives, participant observations, and student artifacts were the primary sources used in triangulating the data.

Intertextuality is very similar to triangulation in that it provides valuable data from multiple sources. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation is a strategy that usually refers to using “different data collection modes (interview, questionnaire,

observation, testing) or different designs” (p. 306). Intertextuality refers to the more humanistic aspect of the triangulation process that seeks similar narratives from different perspectives (Casey, 1993; 1995-96). For this study these different perspectives were gender, economic status, and standardized academic ability levels. In this study intertextuality sought to connect the complementary and contrasting interpretations of African American students perspectives regarding educational experience and identity development from each text.

As stated by Lincoln and Guba (cited in Creswell, 1998), member checking is considered “the most critical technique” in establishing trustworthiness (p. 202-203). It is the taking back of result to those who authored the narratives that led to the conclusion. This polite gesture of gratitude toward those who participated in the study increases trustworthiness of the study by gaining approval of the reconstruction of narratives through participant recognition. Its purpose is to rule out “the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say or do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as, being an important way of identifying your own biases” as a researcher (Maxwell, 2005, p. 211).

The last part of the trustworthiness process I sought to establish was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing will provide an external check, or a “devil advocate’s” view of the information gathered. The role of the peer debriefing sessions is for a colleague or member of the interpretative community to provide a critical perspective into the methods, meaning, and analysis of information (Creswell, 1998). Scholars and African

American colleagues were used as debriefing consultants during the analysis phase of this study.

The trustworthiness process of this study brings creditability to the interpretations gathered from the emerging patterns, common “voice”, educational experiences, and language found within the individual and collective narratives.

Summary

There are relatively very few narrative studies that present the African American student perspective. Although there is extensive research regarding the teaching techniques and learning styles of African American students, few of these studies incorporate methodologies that explore the “voice” of black students. Methodological designs are not blindly chosen by researchers. Instead, research methodologies are carefully constructed based upon the purpose of the study, the need for exploration, and complexity of the phenomenon.

In Chapter II, I situated the lenses, or perspectives, that direct this study. The lenses of which I speak were described within the theoretical orientation and conceptual framework found in that chapter. Using scholarly literature exploring theories, intellectual movements, and previous justifications regarding the phenomenon surrounding the achievement of African American students I present the case for a multi-dimensional conceptual framework deeply rooted within the foundations various theoretical orientations.

I began Chapter III by providing a rationale for situating this methodology within the qualitative research paradigm. I then described the qualitative research paradigm and

the philosophical assumptions and an ideological stance upon this paradigm is situated. I explained how I used the phenomenological tradition and social constructs of language that led to the development of a narrative research design. Furthermore, I provided my own subjectivity, supplied details regarding the research site and selection of participants, as well as information regarding data collection and analysis procedures. I concluded this chapter by discussing the verification process and the apparent strengths and limitations of this work.

In the next chapter, I will provide the audience a glimpse into the identity portrait collaboratively created by the researcher and the participants of the study. I will describe the participants using researcher notes and direct quotes. It will be an opportunity for the audience to visualize how the collaboration between the researcher and informants evolves into a unique identity portrait.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Introduction

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who I am depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. . . As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.
(Tatum, 1997, p. 18)

We are all story tellers, and we all have stories to tell. Had William James (1892/1963) been a narrative psychologist when he wrote his much quoted chapter on the self more than 100 years ago, he might have conceptualized his famous distinction between the “I” and the “me” as that between the self-as-teller and the self-as-the-tale told. . . The I tells a story of the self, and that story becomes part of Me.
(McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006, p. 3)

The purpose of Chapter IV is to provide a stage for the informants to provide a description of themselves to those who may read this dissertation. William Shakespeare said it best when he wrote the words, “All the world is a stage, and we are merely actors.” From a postmodern perspective we are all merely individuals acting out reality within a socially constructed environment.

From this stage, the audience will meet each participant in the order in which I interviewed them. I will describe the participants using direct quotes so that the reader will have “an insider’s view of a life” (Brubaker, 2000, p. 100). In short, it’s an opportunity for the audience to visualize how the informants use their narratives to create

and represent a distinct identity. The audience will get a glimpse of the “self-as-teller” and the “self-as-the-tale told” as described by McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich (2006, p.3). As a result, the audience can picture “a living being walking off the pages” (Ambrosius, 2004). Each participant shared part of his/her life with the researcher; my intent is to afford the audience the same privilege.

The narratives from these African American participants did not represent one particular perspective. They reflected a variety of home life experiences, academic achievement levels, socioeconomic statuses, and educational experiences from rural, urban, public, and private school settings.

In Chapter III, I provided a rationale for situating the methodology within a qualitative research paradigm. I described this paradigm along with the philosophical assumptions and ideological stances upon which this paradigm is situated. The goal of Chapter IV is to merely provide the audience a glimpse into the identity created by the participants. Further analysis regarding patterns, themes, and metaphors will be discussed later in the Chapter V.

Jazmine

Jazmine is an eighteen year old senior attending Horace Mann High School. She is a native of the area as she maintained, “I’ve been in Jonesborough all my life. I am a child of a single mother of three. I’m the only girl. . . My brothers are into more things than I am. I am all about school and sports and stuff like that.” She characterizes herself as cheerful person with a bubbly personality. From follow-up conversations I learned

that she encountered many obstacles as an adolescent, one would never know because she does not “wear her problems.”

I first encountered Jazmine three years ago as a student in my class. I recall that Jazmine didn't complete that year at Horace Mann High School as a student in my class. She transferred out to another high school that year; however, over the course of the next three years, I noticed that she had re-enrolled and transferred out of Horace Mann High School several times. Jazmine spoke about her mobility as student:

I went to Adams Elementary which is a majority white school. I went to East Garner Middle School which is a straight majority black. . . Uh, we switched schools so many times, it just. . . I went to Athens Drive. I went to Middle Creek High School in Virginia. I went to Leesville Road High School and now I am at Horace Mann. . . This is my first year ever at the whole school like a whole year.

She provides this glimpse into her family background:

I know we have, our family's been mixed the whole time. Like my grandma's dad was a mix with black and white and their parents were white and Indian. All my family is really mixed. Because I have a Polish uncle, my aunt married a Polish uncle. My uncle married Italian. So, we have like...we don't care in my family. We don't see color like, oh, we shouldn't be doing this or you shouldn't be doing that. Once you love a person, my momma says, it doesn't matter. So our family is really, not even like if you was to come to my house, it wouldn't be like, oh, what he is doing here, you know, it would be okay.

According to standardized test measurements, Jazmine is considered a level III student with a 3.3 GPA. She described her academic abilities as “above average. . . yeah somewhat.” Furthermore, she offered this depiction of herself as a student:

I don't like school but I come anyway. . . [Smiling] I guess you should get an education even though you don't like it. . . Ummm. . . I do my work sometimes. I like the academic life but I don't like people [the students]. They are all into what they have to be into, fashion, into he say, she say, into boys and girls, and all that drama. I don't have time for that.

Her plans after high school were to go into the military, but she recently changed her mind. "I'm going to RTCC then transferring to Millersville University, and then I'm going into the military." Her interest in the military is associated with the strong military legacy of her family:

My family is all military which I'm suppose to be military. . . My paw paw was in the military. His daddy was in the military. I'll be the first girl in my immediate family. . . All of my uncles are in the military. My interest [as a student] is ROTC. I give all my time to ROTC.

Jalynn

Jalynn is an eighteen-year-old senior with whom I first became acquainted two years ago while teaching her sister. Jalynn is one of three sisters who are currently under foster care. Jalynn has been more successful in school than her sisters when comparing attendance, grades, and discipline. Comparing herself to her sisters she stated, "I would be a well above average [student]. . . a 3.67 GPA. I'm more involved and outspoken on various activities such as FCCLA, FBLA, and a lot of other things such as marching and the concert band."

What makes her physically stand out in a regular crowd of high school students is her appearance. She is extremely tall and always very well-dressed when attending school. She does not dress like a typical adolescent following the recent fashion trends of

the Hip Hop movement. Rather, she comes to school dressed very business-like on a daily basis. She enjoys helping others, especially those who need assistance. She asserted, “I volunteer at various daycares and I’m like the residential caregiver for my nephews at home and other family members and I’m working now [as a waitress].”

Jalynn believes she is fortunate to live in a positive environment that offers continual support and direction.

I live with two families that really care for me and they have really took me in and I think it was a great experience for me personally as an African-American. . . So now that I have moved into a better home and a community, I think that it is something for the better.

Jalynn has a very strong self image and is confident about her abilities as a student, including her future directions. She stressed:

I’m just a well-rounded person who enjoys doing things and involvement in the community. . . I think that I am a very well rounded person and during school I think I do well, where I don’t let nobody get in my way and if I want to reach a goal, I reach it. I just set my standards high and I reach them. I don’t let anyone get in my way. . . I think. . . I am well above average. I plan on going to Millersville University and majoring in school counseling with a minor in social work.

Jalynn is most proud of the opportunity she was afforded to work as a House Page for the North Carolina legislature. She called to mind:

I had the opportunity to go to the House of Representatives. I was supposed to serve as a House Page and I thought that was a big achievement because me being a black, I didn’t think I could really do that. . . I really learned a lot while serving as House Page. . . Well as a House Page there, all I did was, I just basically ran errands for the House’s and I sat there and listened to them do sessions and I sat

there and listened to them like when there was a committee meeting. . . I think it would be something that I would be interested in, working in politics.

Christina

Christina has attended Horace Mann High School for four years. She is currently a senior with a 3.5 GPA. Although she has attended Horace Mann during all four years as a high school student, she did not attend the traditional feeder schools associated with Horace Mann. She spoke of her transitions through school, “I went to York [Elementary] and I went to Carnage [Middle] like the first week of my sixth grade year because my momma got me transferred but they denied it so she went to a hearing and then I went to Daniels [Middle] all the rest of the time and now I am at Horace Mann.”

A participant in this study first introduced me to Christina. She regards herself as a very shy and reserved student who really does not have much to say to others during the school day. She states, “My friends. I talk to one girl.” There is very little interaction between her and other students. This is her introduction to our interview session, “I am very boring. . . all I do is work. Spend all my time with my momma and my brothers. Cause I don’t like to go to da’ club and all that stuff. . . I just don’t do that, so that’s about it.”

She described herself as a “good” student. She claims, “I’m good. . . I mean I do [Pause]. . . I do whatever I’m supposed to do in school. I make decent grades. I make A’s and B’s. I should make all A’s but I don’t [Pause]. . . that’s about it. I can try a little bit and make an A or a B and I don’t have to try real hard so I don’t.”

She spoke briefly about being a black student:

I don't think like being a black student and going through school. I mean it's just, it's just school. I don't feel like I actually hear or say anything different just because I was a black student and anything else. Like coming here was different because most of the schools I went to were like mostly black schools because I didn't go to West Lake and coming here I didn't know a whole lot of people because I'd been going to East Wake and Adams so most of them went to Athens Drive and Cedar Fork but it wasn't a big deal to me. It was fine. People were nice. So, I went like, oh, I'm going to a white school and there's not a lot of black people there. It wasn't like that.

Monica

Monica is a seventeen-year-old senior attending Horace Mann High School. She lives with both parents and has an older brother who lives in Chicago. Her dad is disabled and her mother works long hours while being the primary care giver for her great-grandmother and great-grandfather. She takes pride in her family heritage stating, “[Smiling] Yeah, I’m Otis’s granddaughter. Yeah, I’m Otis’s granddaughter.”

I first met Monica as a student assistant in the front office at Horace Mann. What intrigues me the most about her is her polite and well-mannered approach to greeting students, parents, and central office employees as they enter our school. She is very involved in school and is a well-rounded student as she uttered, “I’m a member of various clubs as well as organizations. . . SADD, DECCA, FBLA, Spanish Club, majorette, and student council.”

She described herself as an above average student with a GPA of 3.56. She emphasized, “I’m dependable. . . [Pause] I try to balance my weaknesses and strengths and if I need help I ask the teachers. . . [Pause] I work two jobs during the week and weekends and that’s it. I stay at home, [I’m] a homebody.” She is a very articulate and

intelligent student who knows what it takes to get the job done. In one word I would describe her as dependable.

Her greatest accomplishment was winning Ms. Entrepreneur while a Junior in school. Monica has blossomed while being a student at Horace Mann transitioning from a shy awkward student who did not want to come to school, into a high school graduate preparing for college in this fall. She recalled this transformation:

I remember my first day, my momma had to ride, well she had to drive me to the bus stop because I told her I wasn't coming to school because I didn't want to go to high school. . . I was scared. . . [Frowning] I didn't think I was going to meet any friends. . . [Now] I'm the first to graduate, first granddaughter to graduate. First generation to graduate, so. . . I'm going to Saint Joseph's University.

Sable

Sable has attended Horace Mann for nearly three and one half years and plans to graduate and attend a four-year college. She explained, "I came down here during my second semester of my ninth grade [year] and I actually like this better." An African American female staff member referred Sable as a possible informant for this project.

Sable is a fun-loving student who has no problems making new friends. Sable maintained, "After I moved, I adapted to this environment. I like Horace Mann and got to know a lot of people and made new friends. . . I'm the type of person, that I like to help people." She has attended Lacy Elementary School and Moore Square Middle School which are schools outside of the Cash County School District.

Sable has had some personal problems outside of school that have appeared to be problematic for her as a person as well as student. She spoke about herself as an individual:

Well about me individually. . . [Pause] Well, of course I'm eighteen and as far as me, I don't know what to say about me. I've been through a whole lot as far as school and personally. I am not originally from Huntersville. I'm from Moore Square so I grew up there and coming here was like a dramatic change as far as school. I was the quiet type until I got up here, it was kind of different. . . [I am] really outgoing I think, not really as far as outgoing, I mean I like to try a lot of things and whatever, but I don't really put myself with a lot of people. You know, like most students are with groups of kids but I don't really classify myself in a certain group.

She told this story about herself as a student:

As far as school, I am hard working and it's kind of hard now. . . My GPA is a 4.0. It's been a 4.0 since the ninth grade. It dropped down to I'm going to say to a 3.875 which isn't bad but kind of odd because it's always been a 4.0 so I did cry and my mother was like, "Don't cry" and it was just crazy because I mean if you have always maintained something like, it's kind of hard once it goes down and I did bring it back up this year through. I take it that I do very well because when I started taking honors which is in the 9th grade, I never took CP classes. They made me go to AP. I did okay. . . [Pause] as far as English, I did okay because I read all the time but as far as History, kind of bad. I think I do pretty well. I mean I maintain A's and B's and I had one C last year.

Sable has worked very hard academically to maintain good grades and preparing for her future. She is well organized and has thoughtfully reflected about college and career.

She asserted:

I'm starting school June 25th at Bucknell University and I am going to go in August as well. I'm just going to do my four years there. I've pretty much been studying the whole Bucknell University thing and I went to all of their open house so I pretty much have my college/university [experience] planned out. I am going

to double major in Political Science and Psychology because as far as Political Science, I want to be a juvenile justice specialist but if that fails, then I am going to be a child psychologist because I hear they need them.

Lela

I first met Lela four years ago as a rising freshman taking 9th grade physical education and as an athlete at Horace Mann High School. Lela is an eighteen-year-old senior in our vocational department with a focus in early childhood development. Lela described her educational interest:

I enjoy working with kids. I do my internship at Kinder Kare right now. I've worked in daycares for the past three years as a volunteer. When I get out of high school, I want to go to Millersville University after I finish at RTCC for two years. . . major in child development and my fall back is nursing. And after that, I'm thinking about owning my own daycare.

She attended Fox Road Elementary School as a young child and changed middle schools twice attending Carnage Middle as a sixth grader and Ligon Middle as a seventh and eighth grader. Ligon Middle School and Fox Road Elementary School are not the traditional feeder school for Horace Mann High School.

Lela is a considered a Level II student according to standardized testing measurements. As a child from a single-parent home, Lela has had a difficult time as a student for most of her educational career. She asserted:

[During elementary school] I was getting in trouble all the time. Not doing what the teacher told me to do. . . they had to call my momma to come and get me. . . I had a couple of problems in the sixth grade at Carnage. I got into a little trouble with being. . . as being in a gang call the IBBA with a couple of other girls and the school found out. . . My ninth grade year, I really, I didn't enjoy it because I used

to be in trouble a lot. . . just making bad choices and stuff like that. . . I've made a lot of bad decisions in high school

However, Lela recognizes her mistakes and has taken responsibility for her actions. She acknowledged, "I guess I've grown to be mature and thought about my [past] decisions. I just decided if I'm going to make it I've got to do the right thing. . . I haven't done what I could do. . . my twelfth grade year is when I really stood up."

Using her family as a reference Lela discusses some of the changes that have occurred at Horace Mann over the past several years.

Well, I've head a lot of stories like from my mom or my dad and my aunts and uncles who went here and how they told me like Horace Mann used to be a predominantly white school and race was a big issue when they went here and they had to go through a lot. . . And I just see that being back then how bad race was and now as in me coming to Horace Mann, I see a big change in race, you know. . . I don't see racism. I don't see that. Especially with any the teachers. I don't think that's the problem with any the teachers or the students. I know there's probably a couple of students here that don't like black people and they're a couple of students who don't like white people but it's not a problem. It's not an issue.

Melanie

Melanie is a well-dressed, articulate, and modest senior attending Horace Mann High School. An earlier participant referred Melanie to me during the interview process. She is a Level IV student who has earned a four-year scholarship to a local state university. She added this regarding her academic abilities, "I'd say [I'm] above average. . . I've been in the Century Club and stuff for. . . the past two years, [that's] the top 100 students in the school, so I'd say that is pretty good." She considered herself a

gifted student, “I guess I’m naturally smart or whatever, intelligent. And, you know, I was in AL or AG when growing up.”

Melanie considers postponing work as one of her biggest obstacles as a student.

She attests:

But my big problem as a student is procrastination and that is something that I still feel like I have to work on. And I don’t really know how I am going to work on it. I need better study habits and to work on procrastination for college so I can do what I have to do to do that.

She attended Millbrook Traditional Academy a magnet school for students with strong academic potential. She later transferred to Carnage Middle which is the feeder middle school for Horace Mann. She comes from a single parent home.

Melanie is a very friendly person who does not have trouble relating to others regardless of their race. She explained:

Huh. . . [Pause] I guess, a lot of people say I am a cool person or whatever, so I get along with most people and I try to, you know like, talk with everybody and get along with everybody, not just like people that I’m used to, like as far as being my same race or whatever or black or whatever. . . I don’t know, I just like people and I like to get along with people. . . I like to have fun.

Melanie has thoughtfully reflected upon her career and education goals. She claimed, “I have an interest in the medical field and I’m going the Temple University in the fall and major in chemistry or biology so I am going to be a dentist. . . I just decided on dentistry because I was realistic.” She is actively involved in extra-curricular activities participating in the both the chorus and flag programs at Horace Mann.

She offered this dialogue regarding her first impression of Horace Mann:

Um, when I first got to Horace Mann there were not as many, I guess, diverse people but it has grown, like the population of the school has gotten bigger and then there have been more African-Americans and Latino's and other different types of people and I guess I like that and I had that conversation, I think, yesterday, with a lady that was here. I guess she was visiting or something. And she just asked me what I liked most and I told her people and how it has changed.

Bailey

I first met Bailey as a media assistant last year. She describes herself as a very energetic, talkative student, yet still well-mannered in the classroom. Bailey is an eighteen year old senior at Horace Mann who lives with her mom and step-dad. She provided this information about her home life, "I'm not too stressed out. Things are calm as far as my home life is concerned; no financial burdens and stuff is flowing good right now. Over the years we have been through a lot but they have stuck together no matter what."

Bailey attended York Elementary and Carnegie Middle School before attending Horace Mann as a high school student. Neither one of these schools are traditional feeder schools for Horace Mann. She considered herself a good student. She exclaimed, "I'm a pretty good student. . . average. . . A or B." According to standardized tests Bailey is a Level IV student.

She is a very active student outside of school. She maintained, "I've been working. . . I like dance. I have done different dance teams outside of school. I have been captain of most of those teams." Bailey is currently in the vocational department with a focus in early childhood development. Nonetheless, her educational aspirations are to complete a two-year degree in business at the local community college and attend

beauty school. Her career goal is to complete beauty school and open a business. She lives her life according to her mother's maxim, "Just put your best effort in and it pays off."

Jovan

Jovan is a well-rounded senior attending Horace Mann High School. He has spent most of his years as a student within the private school environment. He proclaimed, "I went to a private school from kindergarten to seventh grade. . . Brentwood Academy and Wakefield Christian Academy. I switched in my sixth grade year and went to Wakefield Christian Academy. . . [For me] they're both the same." Nonetheless, attending private school appears to be point of concern for Jovan and his identity as he stated, "I was kind of sheltered. . . [Pause] away from a lot of stuff in public schools. . . I think I was sheltered from a lot of things. . . So I really didn't know what went on."

Jovan comes from an upper-class background and has been afforded many cultural experiences that have not been available to his peers. He adds, "Because they have a little...I'm talking about black, white, Hispanic all of....everybody has a little bit more money on that side of town." He is very articulate and well-dressed as an adolescent male. He is a child of a two-parent home where he was pushed to perform academically. He declared, "I mean, that's what my mom and dad always made me do was get my [school] work done." He is considered a Level III student according to standardized test with a 4.1 GPA. He will attend a private university in the fall to play college football.

This is his description of himself as a student:

I think I'm not the smartest person in class but I'm not the person that's not going to try. . . Like I'll always try. . . I mean I don't just come from. . . [Pause] people say, just because you're smart . I am a smart person but I think it's because I apply myself well and I try in every class no matter what class it is. I try to get at least an A or B in the class. So, I think I'm a very good student. I struggle in classes just like everyone else because math isn't my forte but I still strive to get a B at least in every math course I take.

Jovan is the captain of the football team and he considers himself a good leader.

Jovan has played sports in high school and is an active member in his church while a student at Horace Mann High School. He has a unique talent that he shared, "I play the piano. . . I started playing when I was about four or five and I just played by ear so whatever I heard I could pick up. [Later] I started playing for my church."

He briefly mentioned his transformational journey from elementary school all the way through high school including both the public and private sphere:

Horace Mann is kind of mixing both aspects of private school and middle school because in private school everything was a close community and when I came to Horace Mann everything was a community but it still gave what Middle Creek had, which was the cliques and everybody being individuals. So I think my experiences in high school was a direct mixture of what happened in private school and what happened in public school in elementary and middle. So I guess it kind of worked out well because I got to understand what was going on in elementary school which was the closeness and then I got to middle school and everybody was diverse. Then I got to Horace Mann and it kind of brought both of them together.

Gerran

I first met Gerran as a ninth grade student playing sports at Horace Mann High School. He was referred to me by one of his peers. Gerran is a Level II student

according to standardize testing measurements with a 2.9 GPA. He is enrolled in general education courses with limited exposure to advanced curricula. He characterized himself as an average student who needs someone to firmly direct him: “I’m probably average. . . I’m a good student. I just like, I get off subject real easy, like real quick but if I. . . [Pause] I’m a quick learner too but I need somebody to like tell me you got to do it. . . I’m kind of lazy.”

Gerran did not attend any of the traditional feeder schools for Horace Mann High School. He was a transient student as young child. He spoke of his mobility, “I started Kindergarten. . . I went to Douglas Elementary School...I went to Lufkin Road Middle School. . . in the sixth grade. . . I went to Heritage Middle School to finish the sixth grade. . . [Finally] I went to Carnage Middle School.” He offered this narrative regarding his arrival to Horace Mann,

When I got to. . . Horace Mann, it was like everybody was equal and everything really and like half the school was white and half the school was black . . . So it was not that big of a difference but it was like you could tell and the students were different though. You can tell that. Because there’s more trouble at Lufkin Road Middle School and Heritage Middle School than there was at Carnage Middle and Horace Mann.

Transferring schools was the result of his parents divorcing. This event became a difficult trial for him as a young adolescent: “My parents divorced and it was a big thing for me then because I like, I kind of understood it. I had a little brother too and he didn’t really understand it and I kind of see like why and everything. . . I saw everything up close and personal and then it kind of messed. . . [Silence].”

Gerran continues to pursue his dream of playing basketball. He plans on attending a two-year technical school and then transferring to a local private university to play basketball with a high school teammate. One thing that his peers do not know about him is that he is also an active member in a summer bowling league where is an above average bowler.

Andre

Andre is a seventeen-year-old senior attending Horace Mann High School. He lives in a one-parent home. He is a Level III student according to state standardized tests and has a GPA of 3.9. My first recollection of Andre is as a coach during his freshman year; he reported to me that someone had stolen his laptop computer from his football locker during practice.

Andre has leadership potential, but, typical of boys, he has never pursued those abilities. He has been in very little trouble as a student. He states, “that was in fifth grade and that’s the only time I’ve ever gotten into any trouble in the office or anything. I probably have tops maybe one write up here and that was probably for something simple but I haven’t been trouble.” He characterizes himself as a smart but at times lazy student. He emphasized:

I’d say. . . [I’m] above average just because like most of the time I do just enough to say that I’m above average instead of being average. . . but I can be above, like an excellent student but I just don’t do it sometimes. . . It’s just like I’m lazy. I just won’t do it for some reason.

Andre began kindergarten at a local religious private school. Prior to the beginning of the fifth grade, he transferred into the Horace Mann district and attended

Salem Elementary and Carnage Middle. He included this story pertaining to his experiences moving between private and public schools.

Well like when I first got into school, I went to a private school so I was the only black person all the way up through fourth grade. I was the only black person in my class for like the first grade through fourth and being there like, it was kind of...it was different because I really didn't talk to many people until about third grade when like another black student finally came and then, because the like white kids, they didn't like treat me different, they just, they already had like the people they talk to and all that. So I was just there and when I came in I was kind of new so I was just there. And like when I finally got, like this new kid came and me and him became friends all the way up to fourth grade and then that's when I switched to public schools. I went to Salem and it was more, it was predominantly black then at Bluefield Christian. . . my classes were then and then I went to Carnage and it became more diverse. But like it wasn't. . . I wouldn't say it was harder or easier. To me, it just felt like I was just the same student. I wasn't treated different, I was, everything was fair to me.

In a later conversation he considers himself a cheerful student to be around. He played football as a freshman, but as a senior he is only involved in basketball and band. He is a member of the National Technical Honor Society and National Honor Society, but admits that he does not actively participate.

He is very clear about his plans for the future: "I'm debating between three schools, no four schools now. . . [Pause] Bucknell, Temple, Swarthmore College, and Villanova. . . I want to be a lawyer so I'll probably seek some kind of law thing." On many occasions his daily attire would resemble that of a lawyer. Andre's physically stands out in a crowd of his peers with his confident attitude and sophisticated dress. He adds this regarding his confidence as a person and student, "But like as soon as I went to Salem everybody was like, yeah he's a nerd and all that and I said, 'okay'. It didn't really bother me.

Da-Juan

An African American colleague referred Da-Juan to me as a possible participant for my study. He is an out-of-state student who transferred to Horace Mann High School nearly three years ago. He introduced himself with this narrative:

Well, I'm eighteen. I have a job at Sonic in Jonesborough on Second Street. I have a sister and two brothers. I stay with my Dad. My Mom stays in Texas. I've been here for three years. I was born in Texas. I like sports. . . I like to play basketball and football. I was interested in running track but I never did. I like poetry. Nobody really knows that I like poetry [Smiling]. . . I just like to have fun outside of school. I guess, chilling.

He described his academic potential, "[I'd] say probably just say average. . . because that's what my grades look like, about average. . . Probably like C's." He takes regular educational courses and is not enrolled in any honors or Advance Placement scores.

Da-Juan has not met traditional college admissions' standards; therefore, he will not be able to enter a four-year college this fall. He is currently exploring enrolling in a two-year technical school to earn transfer credits so he can enter a four educational institution of his choice the following year.

Da-Juan characterized his personality as outgoing and considers himself as someone who loves to carry on a conversation. He can be seen traveling from one social group to the next in the hallways during class exchanges and during class breaks.

He also discussed some the highs and lows of middle school. He mentioned "I got in a lot of arguments with a lot of teachers." He further explains why he got into arguments with teachers:

At that age, I kind of felt like I was misunderstood and I wasn't, like, nobody like would understand like my point of view on certain things. You know, sometimes I was being bad but I was always respectful to my teachers. That's one thing about me. I was always very respectful. So. . . just like being misunderstood and being bad. . . You know, then when I was young I felt like I was misunderstood because, you know, I would talk about certain things like, I'd probably be talking to my friend about something and the teacher, you know, would be like be quiet and then you know, I'd be quiet for a little while then I'd see somebody else talk so I'd be like, okay, they're talking so I guess it's okay to talk, so I started back talking and then the teacher would just send me out and I'd be like, well that's person talking, why don't they get in trouble, and then that's when I'd just get into an argument with the teacher. Like, I was just, I didn't understand, like I didn't understand why it was just like, why single me out, you know. So...

Da-Juan told a story regarding code switching in which he provided its importance and explained how he performs this task:

Okay, when I'm around my friends you might joke, you know laughing, you know, we really don't care what we're saying but I mean, if I'm around a teacher or administrator, you know, I greet them, you know, hello, how are you doing, and you know I'll be real respectful and I mean, that's the way you have to be, I mean because the way that you talk to your friends may not be the language that, you know, that you should use around your peers and you know people that's older than you. You should always have respect for others. . . Yeah, it's been important because when you go out into the world, and you know, after college and everything or even after the high school. Once you know you hit 18, there's a certain way that you have to act around other people, especially if you're looking for a good job. I mean if I'm going to. . . like I have a job at Sonic. When I went to go ask about that job, I had, you know the khakis and button up shirt. I tried to look real nice. I see some people come up there and you know, they just have jeans and a shirt and I mean, I've just always been taught, when it's something important, you should always, you know I mean, look like a business person, look like, you know I mean, you're trying to get ahead in life.

Dallen

Two years ago Dallen transferred to Horace Mann from Panther Creek High School located in Jonesborough. As a child he attended both Fuller and Knightdale

Elementary schools, both of which are non-traditional feeder schools for Horace Mann.

As a young adolescent he went to West Lake and East Wake Middle schools.

Dallen is a student in our Vocational Department seeking certification as an automotive technician. He is a Level III student with an average GPA. He takes regular educational courses and is not enrolled in any honors level or Advance Placement coursed. He described himself as a student:

Well I'm in the. . . [Pause] I guess you could say automotive program. . . [Pause] me as a student it's like, I'm not saying I'm a dumb student and I'm not a smart student. I'm what you would say is an average student who does enough to get by. I don't try to go to the extreme or try to do as little or as much, I just stay in the middle. . . Pretty much I'm an average black male in high school.

Later in our conversation he defined an average black male as "one who's either out of a [the immediate] family household or one just struggling just to make it. . . [Pause] to get what he needs to do to be more successful."

He used the following passage to characterize his abilities and potential:

Teachers, they see more in me than what I see in myself. That's what they always tell me all my years through school. I see it too but I don't let it...it's not on my mind all the time. I have other things on my mind, you know what I'm saying, and it's like, I mean they fight more for me than I do myself sometimes. I can admit that.

Dallen described himself as someone who likes to perform yard work and as an amateur car enthusiast. However his is real passion is football as he explains, "That's my main sport, playing football. I started out playing pee wee ball. I didn't play none in

middle school. I played all during high school.’ Why does he play, “. . . the love of the game.”

As part of his educational experience Dallen discussed the role of stereotyping in his narrative:

Going on to middle school, that’s when you start to get stereotyped like this is great here and that’s when you get your so called reputation and stereotype starts to build up. You just find yourself around people who are more like you as far as outside of school and in school and you just build friendships around that. . . and going, like leaving middle school and going to high school is like, that’s when you really have your reputation built up and your style, your attitude, sports, athletic skills, grades, girls and you just carry all of that into your high school and it’s up to yourself to keep it going.

Currently, Dallen lives with a relative and has periodically been shuffled between his mom and dad. The divorce of his parents has become a difficult part of his life which has affected who he has become. He asserted:

He moved. . . [Pause] him and my mom split up after I was born. It’s probably been like when I was around three, four or five and he moved down there with his sister. . . He went down there to say, start over, regain his life back and everything because of the troubles he got into up here. . . I go down there and spend time with him. . . my mom brings a friend home and they get married. . . [Pause] Sometimes we don’t connect. . . [He’s] really not nothing to me besides my mom’s husband. . . [Recently] I got kicked out. . . I stay with a friend, I stay wit’ my cousin on my dad’s side.

Winton

As a transfer student Winton enrolled in Horace Mann two years ago from Athens Drive High School in Huntersville. He attended the non-traditional feeder schools of

York Elementary and Adams Middle as a child and young adolescent before enrolling in Athens Drive High School.

Winton is a popular and confident student at Horace Mann. “I’m a well known person. . . I am always a popular kid,” he states. He described himself as a student, “I think I’m above average. I mean because, I like some of the stuff, I catch on quicker than other students. I can do things faster than other students but in some other cases, I mean, I like play around.” He is a Level III student according to standardized tests with a 3.0 GPA. He has a unique blend of street and book sense.

Winton is not very involved with organizations or clubs within the school. He explained his interests outside of school, “I like basketball. . . I mean playing sports and stuff like that. . . like outside of school, I [am] in the streets. . . I [am] not doing anything bad I [am] just in the streets”

Nonetheless, Winton understands the importance of school and has developed well-organized plans for the future:

I mean, I’d say I’m working on my school, I mean, I’m really focused on trying to do something with my life. I’m going to end up going to Delaware Valley College, major in National Business and minor in Accounting. I figure in National Business because I really got a thing for real estate, so I felt like if I went into national real estate that I could be worldwide and do different cultures and stuff like that and I’m doing accounting because I like messing with money basically.

He spoke briefly about his transition from his previous high school to Horace Mann:

The transition was, I mean, it was different for me because coming from Athens Drive was an all black school like with me being around all black kids and like the environment that I always was around was fights. You know, stuff like that.

Myself, I wasn't involved in stuff like that. . . coming from an all black school then coming to a majority white school. . . it was a transition for me but when I came over I think I like the diversity. . . I came over here and I was focused. I mean, I knew coming here my senior year did it. I'm saying I had plans on doing stuff in my life so I think me just coming here being focused and knowing what I'm trying to achieve for my life, that was basically how I was coming.

Winton discussed the value of home in developing ones identity at school in his narrative.

He explained:

You have some kids that you know they came from a bad home or something like that. And I don't think they cared much, there background was being bad so when they come to school, I mean it affected other kids. Being bad like it affect people around them but I mean, me, I'd mix with it but I didn't mix with it.

Odell

I first met Odell three years ago as a sophomore playing football for Horace Mann High School. An African American female staff member referred Odell to me as a possible participant for this study. He is a giving individual. For example, in his narrative he uses this passage, "I decided to go into social work to kind of like give back, you know to those who gave to me." He recognizes the limitations of his socio-economic background and tries very hard to overcome these obstacles. "Right now, I'm just focused on the future. . . [Pause] trying to get everything set up with that. . . [Pause] I plan on. . . [Pause] getting out of here. . . I plan on joining the Air Force."

Odell did not attend any of the elementary or middle feeder schools for Horace Mann High School. He attended two elementary schools, Cary and Hunter. He attended two middle schools Lead Mine and Cedar Fork. He transferred in to Horace Mann from Sanderson High School during his freshman year.

Part of Odell's mobility as a young student was based on his discipline problems. Odell recognized that he had some difficulties as a young student but refused to blame others. "I got kicked out of there my sixth grade year. . . I mean, I'm not saying it was those teachers' faults or whatever. . ." He displays maturity and accepts responsibility, "I know it was all me. . . I developed, you know, a real bad temper."

Odell credits a program called Project Effort that targets at-risk youth, organized by Dr. Tom Brady at a local university, as helping him become a better person. He claimed:

He took me under his wing. . . I do feel that it helped me a whole lot. I mean, it helped me handle situations a whole lot better. . . [Pause] I still follow those goals today. I mean, they've helped me evolve a lot and so as the years went along, you know, me and Tom, we still get together, play golf, whatever, and basketball.

According to standardized testing measurements Odell is a Level II student. He described himself as a student:

I'm an easy student. . . I mean I'm not the best student. I'd say around average, I mean, you know I make sure I do all of my work. . . [Pause] to the best of my abilities. . . [Pause] I try to follow directions as much as I can. [I] don't give my teachers, you know, much problems. . . I'm trying to do the best I can as far as, you know, work and being a student.

He described his hobbies as ". . . playing football, playing basketball and spending time with my family. Just, you know, being me." He offered this description of his transition to a new school:

And I enrolled here at Horace Mann. I've been here since my sophomore year. I came here, I didn't...I wasn't really fond of it at first. I didn't even know Horace

Mann existed. I'd never heard of it until my sophomore year. So, while I'm here, I'm like man, this school is small and you know, after spending maybe a few months here or whatever, I know, I mean, I noticed and all like quickly, like people was interacting with each other and so I like I kind of. . . well let me try and whatever. So I went out there and started talking to people and I got familiar with a whole lot of kids that like stayed in my neighborhood that went to this school also. I kind of, you know, started hanging with them after school, like meeting up with them at the park or something playing basketball, going to little parties and stuff outside the school with them and you know, that kind of built up my friendship levels to where I wanted to like, involve myself with other people. You know, start to just try, you know different things. So it's kind of just like, I could say that me coming to this school, it's probably one of the best schools I've probably ever attended. Academically and you know just being a student period. I mean, like, I joined the football team my junior year here and had some of the best times of my life.

Deshane

Deshane is an eighteen year old senior who transferred to Horace Mann High School two years ago from Broughton High. Deshane comes from a single-parent home and has attended two elementary schools, Morrisville and Underwood. He has also attended two middle schools, West Millbrook and Ligon. None of the elementary or middle schools that Deshane attended are traditional feeder schools for Horace Mann.

Deshane transferred in and out of schools as a result of discipline issues. "My momma. . . [Pause] she was like, she'll let me stay if I don't get suspended no more and I got suspended. . . I was suspended a whole lot of times. . . [Pause] and then my momma took me out. . . All this time, going to these different schools. . . I moved everywhere", he added.

When prompted to talk about his educational experiences He provided these thoughts in his narrative regarding elementary school:

Well, Underwood Elementary, that was a straight...it was alright. The teachers were nice, you know, like no racism in that you know, some schools be racism, and we stayed...we didn't stay like in a good neighborhood. We had bad people like do crazy things to the principal so it wasn't a good place. Then Morrisville Elementary, I think that's like the best elementary school. It was straight going there. They did a lot of things for the students. A lot of fun activities, it make you like want to stay, want to come to school the next day. The teachers, they was friends.

He offered these words regarding the differences between the two high schools he attended:

Well, it's been, I didn't really like it but it's been a better transition here, because honestly Horace Mann is trying to help me find myself like, because at Broughton, like the counselors I have, they're good. At Broughton, I had never seen a counselor office unless it was for, even if I was failing they wouldn't call me down there. It had to be something else about next year, signing up for classes and that would help you get into college, none of that stuff. And then, the teachers at Broughton, yeah they was cool, but they couldn't teach you as good as most of Horace Mann teachers like just about all of them can teach real good.

As a Level II student, according to standardized measurement, Deshane has had difficulty getting into a four-year educational institution. He stated:

I just sent my [application] to Lock Haven University. Lincoln University, they want one more SAT score. I'm going to take the ACT though. . . Ms. Larlick said she was shocked that I didn't get accepted to Lincoln University, but she said the criteria changes every year so what the book say might not be what they go by this year.

He added this regarding his academic potential, "I'm average, I know I'm not well above-average because I don't give it my all every time but like when I do it, it counts. So I just stabilize at average."

Deshane characterized himself as a typical male high school student. He adds, “I enjoy playing sports. . . I like hanging out going to clubs, parties, chillin’ with a few people. I mostly watch cable though and listen to music, R & B, and rap.” He can be a difficult student to teach for some staff members. He acknowledged, “Well, I’m a good student but like the attitude, you know, kicks in sometimes. The teachers may just ask too much, [they] just hit that little tic.”

Summary

As introduced in this chapter, the concept of identity is very complex (Cross, 1971, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Geoffman, 1959; Slattery, 1995; Tatum, 1997). Much of who we are and who we become depends largely on our experiences and the meaning we assign to those experiences. The context of these experiences is very important in the construction of personal identity. Ultimately, we all have a story to tell and that story is assembled within a particular context.

In Chapter III, I provided a detailed analysis into the methodology of this dissertation which described the rationale for this study, the research site, the research participants, and finally procedures for data collection and analysis. The goal of this chapter is to provide the audience a glimpse into the identities of the participants. This glimpse is a construction of the informants using a combination of researcher notes and direct quotes. In the next chapter I will provide further analysis regarding patterns, themes, and metaphors associated with the “voice” of these sixteen African American students.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

Introduction

We arrange and rearrange the [interview] text in light of our discoveries. . . testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse.
(Mishler, 1991, p. 277)

In Chapter IV, I provided a brief snapshot into the identity of the informants using researcher notes and direct quotes from the students. My primary objective for this chapter is “testing, clarifying and deepening” my understanding of what is happening in the discourse of sixteen high school African American students (Mishler, 1991, p. 277). My understanding is presented in the form of five themes that became patterns as noticed in the individual and collective narratives. In the next chapter I will further explore the research questions, discuss the strengths and limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for future research, educational leadership, and school stakeholders. Furthermore, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students. The research questions that guide the analysis process are:

1. How do African American students at a small rural high school describe their schooling experience?
2. How do African American students in a small rural high school view their academic ability, potential, and performance?

3. Who and/or what has had the greatest influence in the formation of the academic identity of African American students who attend Horace Mann High School?
4. What is the relationship between academic identity, educational experiences, and or achievement of these African American students?

The participants, eight males and eight females, chosen for this project reflect a variety of home life experiences, academic achievement levels, socioeconomic statuses, and educational experiences from rural, urban, public, and private school settings.

The participants were asked to respond to the following statements: (a) Tell me about yourself; (b) Tell me about your experience as an African American student growing up through school; and (c) Tell me about your academic identity.

Analyzing the data is not only an overwhelming task but it is also the most important step in the research process (Stake, 1995). For this dissertation, analysis developed into a process that took mounds of data, hours of audio and reduced them into meaningful themes and thoughtful implications regarding future research and educational practices. This process incorporated the constant comparative method that includes unitizing, categorizing, and connecting the narratives of the participants. The themes that emerged from the data are: 1) the significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity; 2) the function of school diversity in developing academic identity; 3) the nurturing role of teachers influencing academic identity; 4) the development of a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity; 5) plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity; and

6) the influential role of supportive parents and family in the development of academic identity.

The Significance of High Expectations in Shaping Academic Identity

The significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity is a point of emphasis and a theme that was shared by both male and female African American students in this project during our dialogue regarding school experiences and academic identity. These two concepts from a cultural foundations perspective are considered as vital elements of school culture that influences a students belief regarding academic ability, potential, and performance in the midst of the socially and politically constructed environment of public school systems.

School culture has been defined within the field of education by scholars and educational organizations for many decades. Nonetheless, the postmodern perspective of school culture lends itself open to multiple interpretations. Traditionally, it has been used as a general framework for comprehending complex problems, understanding social phenomena, and the focus for change and improvement throughout America's secondary public school systems (Stolp, 1994).

The culture of a school shapes its identity but also the identities of those who attend the school. It determines policies and procedures. It defines relationships and learning objectives. It is the glue that bonds administrators, teachers, students, and communities. School culture affects what teachers talk about in the lounge. It affects what students talk about regarding school.

Melanie added this comment regarding the significance of school culture in shaping her identity:

Sometimes I tell my friends, because they went to Heritage Middle, my life would probably be different if I had went to Heritage Middle and ended up at Athens Drive or Leesville Road or somewhere else other than Horace Mann and Carnage. Because you are just around a different environment and different people . . . I don't know what, it's just. . . .

In a later conversation she clarified this response. She used the terminology “different environment” and “different people” to describe what she considered to be the culture of the school. Furthermore, Melanie also expanded on the meaning of her remark, “my life would probably be different if I had went to Heritage Middle and ended up at Athens Drive or Leesville Road or somewhere else other than Horace Mann and Carnage.” She used the word “life” very loosely referring to her identity within the context of school [academic identity], or in using her words “who I am at school.” She used the word “different” in that statement to describe how the culture of those schools would have had a negative influence on her academic identity. She implied that if she had attended Heritage Middle, Athens Drive, or even Leesville Road High School she would have not been as successful in school or become what she deemed as a “much poorer student.”

The ability of “different people” and “a different environment” as Melanie describes it to become a “much poorer student” can have a profound influence on an individual’s academic identity. A second female student expressed her thoughts on this same topic, “If I went to Athens Drive, Moore Square, Panther Creek, or Millbrook, I would not be going to college. I would not be going to college. I would probably be a

teenage mom or probably not doing anything in life.” These students learned that who they become within the context of school affects all facets of their identity.

Comments by these two students illustrate the necessity for exploring the various interpretations of school culture. James Banks (1993), Professor of Diversity and Director for the Center of Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle, speaks about the importance of school culture and faculty participation in developing such a complex social system:

The culture and organization of the school must be examined by all members of the school staff. They all must also participate in restructuring it. Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation. . . achievement,. . . enrollment in gifted and special education programs, and the interaction of the staff and the students across ethnic and racial lines are important variables that need to be examined in order to create a school culture that empowers students (p. 22).

He defines school culture as the communication “to students the school’s attitude toward a range of issues and problems, including how the school views them as human beings and its attitudes toward males, females, exceptional students, and students from various religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic groups” (p. 24).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (cited in McBrien & Brandt, 1997, pg. 89) refers to school culture as “the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways. . . teaching practices, diversity, and the relationship among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school [culture].”

Furthermore, educational consultants Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal (2002) assert that school culture consists of “complex elements of values, traditions, and language” (p.9). They explain in more detail:

Culture exists in the deeper elements of a school: the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and traditions, the array of symbols and artifacts, the special language and phrasing that staff and students use, the expectations for change and learning that saturate the school’s world” (p.9).

School culture can be thought of as a complex social system that preserves, merges, and transmits the meaning of norms, values, teaching practices, relationships, and languages within the school community. School culture is very important because it is associated with increased student achievement, heightened student motivation, teacher productivity, and school-wide satisfaction (Stolp, 1994).

The influence of school culture on school improvement is considerable. Nonetheless, the influence of school culture on school failure is significant as well (Peterson & Deal, 2002). The attitudes and beliefs of those within the school heavily influence the identity of the school. However, there is a reciprocal nature to this relationship because the identity of the school has a substantial effect on the attitudes and beliefs of those within the school. Therefore, school culture influences the identity of administrators, teachers, and especially the students.

Some of the students spoke about the significance of high expectations as an element of school culture that made the difference in lives. In essence this element of school culture influenced their identity within the context of school.

Christina spoke regarding the positive effects that other motivated students have had on her academic identity. She used the example of teachers and administrators who “care” as a way to describe high expectations within school culture. She added these remarks:

Well you don’t have students, like here, you come here and the students are like focused. You don’t have to go into the hall and see kids walking around. It’s like the teachers care more. The principal cares more. It’s just better that way. Because I know like at Athens Drive, we used to walk around all the time and don’t nobody say nothing.

She expanded on those thoughts by saying, “they care more because they ask more of you as a student. They care about why you are walking around in the hall.”

Jazmine also echoed the importance of school culture in establishing high expectations for her “life”, or identity, within the context of school. She believed that school culture has assisted her in the development of a positive academic identity. She discussed the significant influence of a motivated student body and included how teacher encouragement has led her toward academic success or in her own words the ability “to go somewhere.”

I’m really glad I came to Horace Mann. If I went to. . . [Pause] that is if I went to Athens Drive, Moore Square, Panther Creek, or Mill Brook, I would not be going to college. I would not be going to college. I would probably be a teenage mom or probably not doing anything in life. . . [Pause] It is just an influence, the influence that your student body has over you. They can drag you through the mud and they can raise you up as high as you can be but they influence you a lot. . . [Here] you see more people go somewhere. You see students go to York College. You know, you see students, they go to St. Joseph’s College. Students that, you know, they even go to the local community college, but you know they are going to transfer to Bucknell University or Saint Vincent College and you are like, ‘I want to go somewhere’. . . Coach Wallace, he showed me how I can go

somewhere in life. You know, he is like you don't want to be just an 'average Joe.' You just don't want to do everything half way. If you are going to do it, do it all the way.

Sable spoke about the role expectations played in the development of her positive academic identity. She also used the term "us" in reference to the collective subjective of the African American educational experience. "I don't feel like there were any teachers who made us feel like we couldn't achieve or get through anything." Later she indicated that the expectations to perform were appropriately set and they were conditioned to believe that "they" could reach those academic goals.

Da-Juan described how he used personal effort or hard work to establish high expectations in the development of his identity within the context of school. He acknowledged that the lack of expectations can lead to a problem or a false sense of accomplishment in the development of academic identity. In his words:

I mean, that's just, it's like you should work hard no matter what you're doing. In everything that you do you should always work hard. You shouldn't slack off in anything, so, if you slack off on something in the earlier process, you are going to get used to and accustomed to that, so whenever you go to something new, I mean, something like involving academics. . . and all you're going to be used to is slacking off, I mean, that's not going to pay off.

A few students even commented on the lack of high expectations at some point in their educational experience. This lack of expectations appeared to have had a negative influence or even ruptured the development of their academic identities. Furthermore, some of these comments introduced a perceived race factor in the lack of clear and challenging expectations placed on them by teachers and the school community at large.

Sable spoke about the lack of high expectations as a result of her being an African American student. She used language that indicated her membership within an interpretive or collective community using the terms “we” and “us” to describe common experiences shared by her black peers. This emphasized that she along with her peers shared a particular cultural framework of meaning regarding academic identity.

Like at Athens Drive High School, certain teachers, I won't describe them as prejudice but it's like they didn't believe in what we could do so they gave us a hard time. . . and it was kind of hard as far as my English teacher, actually I don't even remember her name, she was kind of hard on me and my friends because the majority of the class was actually African American students and she had her moments. . . thinking that we didn't do what we could do. I always personally wondered like why certain teachers didn't think we could do as much as others.

Jazmine discussed the negative influence of lowered expectations within a school culture and the impact it had on learning and ultimately her academic identity. She utilized the phrase “didn't care” to refer to the lack of high expectations.

I liked the students [at Middle Creek] and everything because it's so big and stuff like that, but academic wise you didn't [learn] anything. You sat in class. You didn't learn. You did what you wanted to do. You left, you come back. You could skip. They didn't care. I didn't learn much there.

Andre also provided a similar example using the phrase of “wouldn't care” to refer to the lack of high expectations. “I mean, I actually think that Leesville Road wouldn't care if I got an F everyday. I have some teachers here that wouldn't care if you got an F everyday.” In further conversations both of these students agreed that teachers they described as having a perceived attitude of “not caring” also had minimal expectations of them and other black students in the classroom.

Later Jazmine mentioned how a teacher's perception of race could have damaging effects on one's academic identity. This perception also influenced her ability to receive extra help or what she referred to as "leeway" according to Jazmine:

One time I was like the only black person in the class. So it's like, okay, alright, so you think I'm not going to do my work. . . or you already have this perception of me before you even know me. Some [teachers] try to make you feel like that. They don't give you no leeway at all. And sometimes people do need leeway. Sometimes people do need like an extra day or something like that.

Da-Juan spoke in general terms regarding how a teacher's perception toward black students could affect one's belief regarding achievement:

I mean. . . being a black student is sometimes. . . teachers might try to, you know, give you an easier time, but you know, some students, you know, they don't like that because, you know, they feel like the teacher thinks they're dumb or something.

For Da-Juan being black meant lower expectations and thoughts of being unintelligent. This is problematic for the development of academic identity because lowered expectations limit access of black students to challenging curricula while thoughts of being dumb can also hinder academic development by evoking behaviors that support the concepts of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although from a modernist standpoint it may appear that much of what these students are discussing is simply, teachers holding high expectations for them and not actually school culture citing the lack of rites, rituals, and ceremonies. However, as Patrick Slattery (1995), professor of Teaching, Learning, and Culture at Texas A & M University, asserts the postmodern perspective seeks to "transcend the ravages of

modernity” by challenging traditional perspectives of “society, culture, language, and power” (p. 18). Though these students did not directly cite examples of traditional aspects of school culture such as rites, rituals, and ceremonies much of what they discussed is what Peterson and Deal (1992) refer to as the deeper elements of school culture “the unwritten rules and assumptions” and “the expectations for change and learning that saturate the school’s world” (p. 9). Their conversations about high expectations are not a single depiction picturing the culture of Horace Mann High School put rather a collective cultural portrait from a variety of educational experiences from elementary, middle, and high school.

Furthermore, it appeared from the narratives of these informants that the words of Henry Ford “Whether you think you can or think you can’t - you are right” still holds true nearly fifty years later. Their texts emphasized how high expectations or the lack thereof is a major element in school culture and thus influenced the formation of their academic identities. School played a critical role in the shaping of academic identity in these participants by the expectations set forth through the culture of the various school environments.

Bonnie Benard (1995), co-founder of the National Resilience Resource Center, attested to the significance of high expectations in schools. She remarks, “Schools that establish high expectations for all students--and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations--have high rates of academic success” (p. 83).

Similarly, Schilling and Schilling (1999) add these remarks on the importance of high expectations:

[T]he literature on motivation and school performance in younger school children suggests that expectations shape the learning experience very powerfully. For example, classic studies in the psychology literature have found that merely stating an expectation results in enhanced performance, that higher expectations result in higher performance, and that persons with high expectations perform at a higher level than those with low expectations, even though their measured abilities are equal (p.5).

The reference to classical studies in this quote refers to what many within the field of education refer to as the Pygmalion effect. The Pygmalion effect describes the cognitive and affective transformation from bad to good based on the expectations demanded upon them. It is believed that low-level achievers can be transformed into successful learners as a result of greater demands placed on them in the classroom by teachers.

Previous research has shown that high expectations are a major component within the culture of successful schools (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Successful schools share certain cultural characteristics regarding high expectations. These characteristics can be in the form of written and unwritten emphasis on academics. They also include clear expectations and regulations, high levels of student participation, and a variety of alternative resources such as library facilities, vocational work opportunities, art, music, and extracurricular activities (Stolp, 1994). The narratives of these participants focused on the unwritten aspects of high expectations. Participants were able to identify successful and unsuccessful schools they attended in regards to the establishment of high expectations.

The Function of School Diversity in Developing Academic Identity

In addition to the significance of high expectations, a key aspect of the school environment that the participants felt considerably shaped their academic identity is the influence of a diverse student population within the school. Although much of the scholarly literature regarding diversity within the school context focused on instructional practices, many of the students simply identified the differences in race, ethnicity, and peer groups as influences in the development of their academic identity.

Winton discussed his transition from a homogenous school environment to a more heterogeneous school environment was better for him as student.

So I think, I mean it was better for me to come over here [Horace Mann]. . . I mean, it was a transition for me but when I came over here. . . I like the diversity. With the diversity factor I think that it is better because you get to see different cultures, different sides of people that you wouldn't have ever seen with just one type of people.

Jazmine also reiterated in her interview the importance of transferring from a homogenous school environment to a more heterogeneous environment.

There are so many different races [here]. It is like mixed, completely mixed. . . It is like the best experience of my life I swear to you. So it is like very interesting and then you get to fit in and there's like so many different groups and crowds. . . it is all of the punk rock people, the black people, the white people, the stuck up people [Laughter].

Javon and Deshane both spoke about what they like best regarding school environment. Javon stated:

I think the diversity here...it's real diverse at Horace Mann because of the fact that we have a new magnet program and it's bringing a lot of students of totally different backgrounds who probably would have never even went here if it wasn't for that program."

Deshane added this remark regarding diversity as an important element of school culture:

I like the different kinds of people. You have like. . . they're Muslim. . . you have those, you have Caucasians, blacks, rich and poor you know and then everybody likes everybody. . . So it's decent.

Later Javon added this thought, "I'm thinking like a pathway has been made, is being set to where people of all races can strive to move forward."

Sable discussed her thoughts on diversity as an important element in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school selection.

If I had to choose. . . I think I would rather be in a mixed school anyway rather than an all-black school. . . It seems more civil being in a more diverse school, rather than being in an HBCU or a predominantly black high school, elementary or middle school. Personally I have my own judgments. I'm not racial against my own race but when we do get together, it's like it is a big riot, like we don't know how to act and that is what law enforcement gets that perception about us and even at black colleges, a lot of stuff goes on, more than it would in a mixed school. That's why I would rather be in a mixed school because I've always grew up basically in mixed schools. I've never lived in an all-black community.

For Sable, a homogeneous school environment, especially one that is all black, encouraged racial stereotyping and prejudice. She also explained that attending schools in a mixed environment is beneficial for her academic identity because it is an environment that is very comfortable for her as a black student as a result of her personal life experiences.

Finally, Odell added this thought regarding diversity within school culture. “I mean, I think that at every school you should have some kind of diversity in the school. There should be no reason why you should have, you know, just one predominant race inside your school.” Later, he explained his remark mentioning that feelings of racism in society are heightened when students schooling experiences occur within a homogeneous educational environment.

Some students even spoke about how the lack of diversity within the school environment was troubling to her as a student. Bailey provided this example:

What has really, really bothered me is the cheer leading squad because last year or last season only one black girl made the cheer leading squad and she is not even all black, she was mixed. I felt there was no way possible that not one black girl had what it took to get on the cheer leading squad. That really bothered me. . . That really bothered me and there could have been reasons for that but as many black girls that tried out for the team I do not see how not one could have not made it. . . It made me mad and I still don’t get it. I have never said anything about it but all the girls that tried out were really upset and crying. They were angry too. They were not going to say anything though ‘cause they did not feel it would matter, anything they had to say.

Unfortunately, this lack of diversity also led to silencing the “voice” of black students. Bailey later clarified this point by inferring that if they, referring to the African American students, had complained about it they would have been labeled as trouble makers for using the “race-card.”

Who students become within the context of school is based on the negotiation between *self* and *others* in the midst of the socially constructed environment of public schools. This negotiation becomes more problematic for black students because of the hegemonic nature of American public schools, a complex social structure that uses

cultural, historical, and social dominance as a mechanism for skewing the academic ability, potential, and performance of black students.

This negotiation is also problematic for black students because academic identity influences personal identity which is a determinant for “vocational plans, religious beliefs, values and preferences, political affiliations and beliefs, gender roles, and ethnic identities” (Tatum, 1997, p. 53). It evolves into an issue of race because that is the perspective of mainstream Eurocentric society. Therefore, it becomes natural that black students search for the answer to the question, “What does it mean to be black in school?” The perspective that race matters leads to the construction of academic identities based on pop-cultural ideals and media perceptions which reinforces the mis-education of African American students. According to Brown (1995) and West (2001) academic identity based on pop-cultural ideals and mass media stereotypes can contribute to an ideology of anti-intellectualism for African American students.

This skewed perspective regarding academic ability, potential, and performance of black students is the result of competition between the social constructs of school and culture. This perspective disturbs the development of a positive identity within the context of school for blacks. This disruption in the development of academic identity leads to two important experiences for African American students. First, black students struggle with the choice of accepting or rejecting the academic identity of success that is associated with “acting white.” Ultimately, an oppositional identity forms to help balance the stressors of the social confines of school which are directly at odds with the black cultural ethos (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996). Secondly, many African American

students are shortchanged with regards to school curricula; they are inappropriately tracked into lower level courses and improperly disciplined because of misunderstandings between school and culture (Tatum, 1997). African American students then, according to scholarly literature, begin to “act black” in an effort to shield themselves from the “psychological assault of racism” and to “absorb stereotypical images” from the dominant group in society (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tatum, 1997, p. 60; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

For these participants diversity within the school environment contributed to the development of a positive academic identity because of the lack of familiarity associated with being considered the “other.” From the historical and socio-cultural lens black students have typically been stereotyped and presented as the “other” within the context of school. As a result of this historical and socio-cultural lens a positive academic identity for African American students had become mutated and distorted ultimately affecting achievement in a negative manner.

Instead, the influence of a culturally diverse student body has allowed all the participants academic identity to develop more naturally, in essence, because of multiple “others.” The presence of multiple cultural identities has lessened the tension traditionally associated with “dominant” white identity and “subordinate” black identity that has splintered much the American narratives throughout history. These students have been exposed to “identity-affirming experiences” and information regarding other cultural groups beyond the white middle-class perspective (Tatum, 1997, p. 74). Such exposure has allowed these students to appreciate differences, evolve more naturally

identities within the context of school, and develop pro-social behaviors to respond effectively to racism within the context of school.

An individual's environment can have general influences in the development of one's identity. More so, a student's schooling environment will have an effect on the development of a child's academic identity; these quotes regarding cultural diversity within the school environment provided by the students offered great support to this statement. The narratives by these students imply that cultural diversity is an important element of the school environment.

Research by Illana Kaufman (2003) suggests that African American students prefer learning and social interactions within a diverse school setting. Kaufman's findings support many of the stories these students told regarding school diversity. Participants in this study placed a high value on learning and interacting with students different from themselves. They saw the significance of diversity within their school experiences as a benefit for their learning and living within a global society. School districts, administrators, and teachers should examine policies regarding school redistricting and access regarding challenging curriculums because both have some bearing on the shaping of the academic identity of African American students.

The Nurturing Role of Teachers Influencing Academic Identity

While some students talked about the significance of high expectations and school diversity as an element of school that shaped their academic identity, other students spoke about the nurturing role of teachers as an element of school that influenced who they are

within the context of school. Research indicated that teachers can have enormous influence on the development of a student's academic identity (Kemp & Hall, 1992).

Christina described the role teachers played in shaping her identity as a student in a positive manner. She felt very strongly about being a good student and leaving a positive legacy because she is afraid of disappointing her teachers.

The school itself has helped me, with the teachers. . . even pairs of teachers, you know, they have helped me to be the student I am. I try not to let them down or myself down. So, I think I am lucky and a good student at Horace Mann. And I hope. . . I want other teachers to look at me as that, although I have made some mistakes, I still want to be remembered as Christina Hollingsworth, you know, a student that will go all the way out to do what she has to do [to be a good student].

Literature regarding teacher effectiveness fails to develop a set standard of qualifications or produce a definitive list of effective teacher qualities (Kemp & Hall, 1992; Seldin, 1999). However, most of this literature explores two broad areas of analysis: instructional knowledge and personal qualities.

Many of the students talked about the personal qualities of teachers as having an influence on their academic identity. Bailey spoke in general about her perspective regarding the nurturing role of teachers and then provided a more specific example of a supportive teacher that has influenced her as a student.

I think teachers are there to educate you but I think the real important ones are the ones that make you feel good about yourself and make you understand that they're there and they have a certain bond with their students. Those are the best teachers, not just those who use authority. . . Our main advisor was Miss Carter, a white lady, but she is the coolest lady I know. I was really grateful for her because she was really behind us the whole way and really wanted us to get things off the ground and I am really thankful for her.

From Bailey's perspective, developing nurturing relationships and providing support are personal qualities of teachers that are most influential. Lela shared these same sentiments regarding teacher personality; furthermore, she added the element of caring:

Ms. Martin, she's a really good teacher and she shows not only that she cares but she lets you know, if you feel like you can't make it, she'll give you the encouragement that you can do anything. And she is, like, she is always there. Anytime you need help on something, anything, if you feel down, Ms. Martin, she's like a pick me up. She is very sweet and she is nice.

Jalynn spoke about how caring teachers have motivated her to perform well in school:

The first thing that comes to my mind with teachers is just you have some that really care for you and they are there to help you and want you to pass. Then you have other teachers who just don't care if you don't care and I think that all my years in school, I think that I have always had teachers that really cared and really wanted me as a student and wanted me to pass my level. But I think that teachers are something that we all need because they can help us.

She later indicated, "I passed my level because they helped me and they cared." She explained later that many times the motivation to succeed in school is associated with knowing that teachers wanted them to be successful in school. The perception of teacher qualities then becomes an important element of school culture.

Javon described caring teachers as those who are interested in not only his academic life but they are interested in his personal life as well. He spoke and depicted nurturing teachers as those who are assertive and concerned. Javon believed that teachers can influence the degree of success students have in the classroom as a result of their

expectations. The amount of success a student had in school ultimately determines opportunity and direction outside of school. Influential teachers refused to accept failure:

At Horace Mann a lot of the teachers are more caring as to what goes on in your life and in your studies. I noticed at West Lake, teachers really, I guess they had become used to what was going on. . . But a teacher who really, really cares and who has not seen people come to her class and fail, she's going to ask you to come after school. She wants to help you because she doesn't want you to make that F.

While some students commented on “caring” as an important aspect of a teachers personal qualities, a few spoke about the importance of personal teacher-student relationship as something that affected who they are within the context of school. Patrick Lee (1999) highlights in his ethnographic study with low-achieving students, from the Oakland Unified School District, that the chronic absence of personal teacher-student relationships during the educational process of minority students is a contributing factor to their school failure. This type of positive relationship allows teachers to be seen as caring, feeling, and understanding human-beings rather than mere lifeless repositories of knowledge.

During her interview Melanie discussed her perspective on personal teacher-student relationships. She spoke in general about how building relationships with nurturing teachers can help a bad day become a better day. She introduced trust as a key component in that relationship:

I like when teachers are really involved in their students and they don't just teach and go home and they actually have a relationship with the students and that makes the students like them more. Whether they realize it or not because, you know, if you can laugh and joke with your teacher and you know you have more

fun and you can trust them, especially if you are really going through something, you can always come to them and talk to them and they can prevent a bad situation one day.

Odell added understanding as an important component in the personal teacher-student relationship. From his perspective this type of relationship allowed teachers to act as a mentor or a surrogate family member when personal relationships are absent at home. He used language that indicated his membership within an interpretive or collective community using the terms “them” and “they” to describe his membership within a community of black peers. This emphasized his belief that his experiences as an African American student are similar to other African American students. He stated:

[Good teachers] interact with her students or his students, you know, they try to be understandable about things. I mean, they don’t put more on them than they can bear. You know if they need help [teachers] give it to them or [a teacher] will be there if they don’t have nobody to talk to at home and [they] can be their mentor for them. . .[they] can be that step in person for them.

Jazmine mentioned how the relationship with her ROTC teacher influenced her as a student. “He had to kind of slow me down and stuff like that and he was very sweet and he like acted like he knew me for like so many years but he only knew me that one time period. I think he really changed me.” In a later conversation Jasmine indicated that this relationship with her ROTC teacher shaped her both as a student and person.

Winton added this to the discussion regarding the importance of teachers as an element in academic identity. He recalled a significant relationship with one of his teachers that transcended the classroom.

She was a teacher and the things she did for me, she always came to all my basketball games and she always tutored me and she was always around like she came and visited my family. When my granddaddy died she was at my granddaddy's funeral. . . I mean, some teachers, if you act right I feel like teachers, they can be a big part of your life. If they want to see you succeed. I feel like teachers, I mean, they can be a big part of your life.

I probed Winton to discuss more on what he meant by “teachers, they can be a big part of your life.” According to Winton when the teacher-student relationship has the ability to carry on beyond the classroom it transformed him to become not only a better person but also a better student. Therefore, according to Jazmine and Winton, nurturing teachers can mold both academic identity as well as personal identity. As Winton stated teachers ultimately become “a big part of your life.”

Some students used the terminology “mother” or “father” to describe teachers with whom they had very close relationships with outside of the class. Sable introduced the phrase “mother” to describe her 2nd grade teacher while Gerran considered one of his high school teachers to be a “father figure.”

She was like a mother. She kept me in line. I didn't get in much trouble in 2nd grade; I guess because I respected her more than my other teachers. . . actually I was so close with her that I even went over to her house. It was really great. . . I went to church with her a couple of times.

Because when I came to Horace Mann, it was like he was on me all the time to stay good in class and all that stuff or I got to sacrifice sports. I think that helped me out a lot because of what I had just got done going through. And he stayed on me. . . he was like another, kind of like a father figure more or less.

Nonetheless, I felt like Gerran best summarized how many of the student's viewed the influential role of nurturing teachers regarding their development within the context of

school using the term “family.” Gerran asserted, “Teachers can be friends or family basically, because like say if you don’t have family and stuff, you see teachers everyday and then they become family.” For some of the participants teachers had become “like” a mother or father. The students described teachers as a parental figure as a result of close relationships and experiences both inside and outside the context of school.

The transformational ability of these personal relationships to influence academic identities is not isolated to only teacher, but can also include other school staff members such as school support personnel, guidance counselors, and even school resource officers. Andre included this narrative regarding an important transformational relationship with someone other than a teacher:

I actually realized it, hey I can be somebody because I am actually smart and we had a D.A.R.E. program and we had a black officer and he sat down and talked to me. . . I went to all that stuff and he just made me realize that I was smart and I actually like, now, I actually think I’m smarter now because of him telling me that I was smart.

Very few of the students included stories that explored teacher instructional knowledge as an important attribute. However, it was mentioned by Gerran as an element of academic identity. From his perspective, a good teacher “interacts with the students a lot and like don’t just give out worksheets and stuff like that but like hands on and everything and like.” It appeared from Gerran’s point of view that how a teacher approaches instructional presentation is very important to the development of his identity within the classroom.

Although most students spoke positively about the role of teachers in the development of their academic identity, some spoke about the negative influence of teachers. These students explained the negative manner in which the role of the teacher had affected their identity within the context of school. These students labeled lack of flexibility, absence of a personal teacher-student relationship, and unwillingness to help failing students as obstacles to developing their identity within school.

Monica shared a personal example about the lack of help she received from a teacher regarding important assignments:

I didn't think he was very helpful. When I went to him for help in the classroom he wasn't very helpful. He liked to joke a lot and I really wanted help. I had to make up a test when I had a dentist appointment and trying to make up a test was a problem. Asking him for help with my community service for my senior project was a problem too.

Ultimately, Monica admitted that she did not have a very good rapport with this particular teacher. Basically, there was the absence of a personal teacher-student relationship. The lack of such a relationship created a barrier between her and Mr. Goldberg that could not be penetrated either inside or outside of the classroom. She defined "wasn't very helpful" as lacking flexibility. Therefore, from Monica's perspective Mr. Goldberg's was not very nurturing and his inability to work around non-school related factors was a "problem" affecting her ability to succeed in school.

Dallen also shared a perspective similar to Monica's view on teachers, maintaining that the absence of a personal teacher-student relationship, something he refers to as "one on one time," can lead to student failure. From his perspective teachers

who accept student failure are the ones who also are characteristically considered to be non-nurturing:

[Teachers] don't take the time to help you. . . [Pause] like give you extra credit. . . [Pause] or they just don't take the time to have one on one time with you and they just. . . if you don't. . . they're just like. . . well I'm not going to help you so you do what you want to do. I'm not going to stop my time for you and those are the [teachers] that watch students fail. . . And the ones that watch you fail are just teachers who just don't really care. There just here to do their job and get their money.

Deshane shared an example of how the unwillingness to help can also affect ones identity within school. From his viewpoint the lack of help he received from this teacher provided a harmful effect on regarding his learning and attitude in school:

Well, when I came from East Wake, we were in Spanish I. I was in Spanish I. I was only like on chapter 3 and then I transferred over here and they were on chapter 10. So they knew how [to write] sentences and they know a whole lot of [Spanish] words and I didn't know none of it and she was giving us tests, like the first day, my first day here, she kicked me out, because I got mad because she wouldn't help me. She wouldn't like help me catch up and learning lab was only one day a week so that really made me mad because I couldn't pass, she put an F on my record.

In the era of high stakes accountability created by the No Child Left Behind Act teachers across America have shifted their focus away from the student and place much of their attention on teaching to the “test” (Stipek, 2006). The narratives of these students demonstrate the importance of nurturing teachers on academic identity. These teachers care more about nurturing the student than teaching to the “test.” According to these African American students, teachers who have the most influence on their identity development within the context of school are the ones who are caring, show concern for

personal issues, and develop positive personal student-teacher relationships. It appears from their stories and my observations that these students work harder and perform better academically for teachers who show genuine concern regarding the development of their academic identity. These narratives support a wide range of research that demonstrates the development of a positive academic identity, especially in African American students, within the presence of nurturing teachers (Ferguson, 2002; Howard, 2003; National Research Council, 2004; Pianta, 1999; Stipek, 2006).

The Development of a Positive Conceptual Framework Regarding the Meaning of School as a Means to Mold Academic Identity

In describing their school experiences and the development of their academic identity, many of the students talked about the development of a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school as means of molding academic identity. There is a common myth that African American students fail to see value in the meaning of school (Ferguson, 2003). Research has shown a link between valuing school and perceptions regarding achievement. Typically, a negative self-concept regarding achievement is often associated with a lower value placed on the meaning of school. Therefore, defining school or creating a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school becomes a powerful influence in shaping academic identity (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). As Monica, one of the female interviewees, attested while describing her own conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school, “[School’s] here to teach you as well as to shape who you are and mold who you can be.”

Most of the students in this study perceived school as a learning environment that prepared them for a better future. For instance, Gerran began a group conversation with this statement, “School prepares you for life. That’s what I say.” Deshane followed Gerran with this remark, “School. . . [is] a place of learning.” Andre agreed with both Gerran and Deshane, then summarized and expanded on their thoughts. “I agree. . .to me the meaning of school is to better tomorrow. Because I think everything that schools are set up for. . . is to prepare us for the future and to prepare our society for the future.”

Others viewed school as an important tool for being successful and achieving goals within the context of education. For example, Melanie added this comment:

The school is the key to life and success because without education you are really not going to get that far more than likely. I mean if you get into some good luck maybe you’ll succeed or achieve something but I think that in order to really be somewhere where you want to be, like, whether it’s high achievement or something, you have to work hard to get there and school is going to do that for me. That’s what I think.

Winton continued with the theme of success with his definition of school. “To me, I think school means success. Knowing that they’re putting you through things that you’re going to go through in life. . . I feel like you’re going to need all that to be successful in life.”

Some participants perceived school as a necessary function of life. Christina stated, “I think school is helpful. I do. And I think it, oh, I think it’s necessary.” Odell added his remarks regarding school as a necessary function of life. “I would define it pretty much. I mean, education and you know like, if you want to have a life you need

the education.” Of course, Odell later clarified his remarks indicating that formal education is a necessary aspect of a fulfilling life.

According to Deshane, Gerran, and Andre one positive aspect of their conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school is the belief that it will better their future. Melanie and Winton defined school as an essential key to a successful life--one aspect of their conceptual understanding of school. Complementing this perspective Christina and Odell’s narratives both show appreciation for school and depict education as a necessary function of life. Thus, collectively the positive conceptual framework of these students concerning the meaning of school displays their understanding regarding the real-world value of attending school. Some participants admitted that obtaining an education became beneficial both inside and outside the context school. This point of view by the students then evolves into a vital element for molding academic identity and success in school. These stories dispel the common myth the African American students fail to see value in the meaning of school (Ferguson, 2003).

Preparing themselves for life after school was another positive element in the students’ conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school. Bailey remarked, “I think the meaning of school is to basically get prepared for what’s ahead. To give you general knowledge of what most likely will be going on once you graduate.” Christina added her thoughts regarding independence and life outside of school:

I think it’s healthy for you to learn everything and in a way [school] helps you to be independent because you’re not with you momma all the time and you learn stuff about the outside world from school, like when you get a job, you’ve got to have a boss. You learn this by dealing with teachers. . . So I think that school is necessary.

Christina reflected on this statement and later clarified her remark regarding “you got to have a boss” positioning it in a real-world context to listening and following directions of the teacher whether or not you agree with the teacher.

Da-Juan offered his viewpoint suggesting that school is a continual process of learning. He commented:

The meaning of school. . . learning and growing process. . . I learned in school that, you know, you should always pay attention to every single thing, even the little things, no matter if you are in class, no matter if you’re walking to class, no matter if you’re in the cafeteria eating lunch or breakfast, no matter if you take field trips. Everything is a learning process. You can learn at everything, no matter what you’re doing, you learn something.

Several of the participants defined their secondary school experiences as a necessary avenue preparing them for college. Many of these participants also viewed college as an essential element in obtaining a high paying job in the future. Lela indicated this with her statement. “It’s basically the future, education and going to college. . . so you can get a good paying job because you really can’t get a good job without having first a high school diploma and a good education in college.” Jalynn added her thoughts on this matter as well, “The first thing that I think of is money. Make good grades in school and then you get into a good college and you get a good profession.”

The narratives of Da-Juan, Bailey, Christina, Lela, and Jalynn display a similar positive conceptual understanding compared to the stories of other participants regarding the meaning of school as a way of developing a positive academic identity. The general

consensus, according to these particular participants, regarding the significance of school is the affirming belief that becoming educated is a necessary aspect in the continual learning process that will lead them toward independency, college, and a good paying job. This significant information challenges the cultural theorist perspective that part of the African American cultural framework of meaning concerning school de-emphasizes a positive conceptual construction regarding the meaning of school. From this view point developing a negative conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school is “a justifiable act of racial rebellion” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 144). This act of rebellion places a lower value on the meaning of school which influences one's self-concept within the context of school especially toward achievement. However that is just the opposite for students participating in this research project.

Sable described school as a “priority” and believes that the lack of a post-secondary education can become a major obstacle limiting one's achievements in life outside of school. She explained:

School basically, it might not be the meaning but more similar to it, school basically to me is a priority. I don't put it last. To me, it's first, other than family and what not, but school I think and nothing else gets you somewhere in life, high school, elementary, middle school, college, especially. . . that's why I'm going to further my education. I basically think that without further schooling, beyond high school, people you don't get but so far. . .to me, [school's] just like the biggest.

The description of school as a “priority” by Sable summarized the importance these African American students placed on the role of defining school as a critical developmental factor in shaping academic identity. Their overall conceptual framework

regarding the meaning of school is critical in molding their identity within the context of school. Even though school culture and relationships with teachers have an influence in the shaping of one's academic identity, so do the values students place on school.

According to scholars Gloria Campbell-Whatley and James Comer (2000), the stronger the self-image within the context of school, the higher the value African Americans will assign to the meaning of school which in turn has a reciprocal effect on achievement.

The stories told by these participants supported this research finding.

In the end, how one defines school determines who that person will become within the context of school. Basically, the conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school affects a student's decisions regarding ability, potential, and performance within the context of school. This assumption also furthers the notion that who one becomes within the context of school (academic identity) will influence who one becomes at the end of the formal schooling process (personal identity).

Plans for Attending College as an Essential Element of Academic Identity

A fourth theme that evolved from the narratives of these participants is the discussion of plans for attending college as an essential element of their identities within the context of school. According to educational scholars Gail Thompson (2002) and Tyrone Howard (2003), planning for college is a critical element in the development of one's academic identity for African American students.

When asked to describe their identity as an African American student, all of the participants in this study communicated their plans for college. Therefore, these students interpreted their ambitions for attending college as one aspect of their academic identity.

Below are samples of responses depicting who these participants are as African American students:

I'm starting school June 25 at Bucknell University and I am going to go in August as well. I'm just going to do my four years there. I've pretty much been studying the whole Bucknell University thing and I went to all of their open houses so I pretty much have my college or university [experience] planned out. (Sable)

Um, I have an interest in the medical field and I am going to Temple University in the fall and will major in chemistry or biology because I am going to be a dentist. (Melanie)

I plan on going to college next year. . . I'm debating between three schools, no four schools now. . . [Pause] Bucknell, Temple, Swarthmore College and Villanova. I'm trying to pick which one of the four I'll go to. I want to be a lawyer so I'll probably seek some kind of law thing. (Andre)

For next year, I'll start school in the fall. Right now, either Lock Haven University or Lincoln University. . . I just, I just sent my application to Lock Haven University. Lincoln University, they want one more SAT score. I'm going to take the ACT though. (Deshane)

I plan on going to Millersville University and majoring in school counseling with a minor in social work. (Jalynn)

Many of these participants viewed attending college in pursuit of a career interest as a critical part of their academic identity. Dallen spoke about his career interest and the need for college. "Um, I'm trying to get into college so I can get a degree in communications or engineering." Sable added this remark, "I am going to double major in Political Science and Psychology because as far as Political Science, I want to be a juvenile justice specialist."

Some students acknowledged the difficulty in pursuing career interests as a college student. Christina asserted, “I’m going to Millersville University. . . to study mechanical engineering. . . I think it’s real hard though. This lady was telling me how they guarantee you a job if you lasted the whole five years, like they guarantee you a job. I mean it’s really hard.”

Odell spoke about how his educational experiences influenced his academic identity, especially his plans and interest for college. Upon further inquiry into his interest in studies for college, Odell answered:

I want to take classes in social work because I would like to be a social worker. Considering the fact that throughout my. . . [Pause] from elementary school all the way up, I kind of had people like, as mentors, coming in to check on me. I mean that started back around second grade.

According to Sable, Melanie, Andre, Deshane, and Jalyynn ambitions for attending college is already a pre-existing element of their academic identity. Dallen and Christina furthered this viewed by explaining how pursuing a career interest affected their plans for attending college. Consistent with these narratives, Odell maintained that attending college is an vital aspect of his academic identity indicating that his educational experiences has the greatest influence affecting those decisions. As a group, the educational experiences of these participants lead them to believe that part of who they are within the context of school is where they will be attending college. This is critical to a large extent because courses taken in high school are a significant predictor in college admissions (Grier, 2002; Thompson, 2002). Countless of African American students across America are underrepresented in classes that prepare them for college or

encourage them to pursue college, therefore, aspects of their academic identity are deficient in many regards because they lack plans for attending college as a result of “tracking” and other devastating educational policies (Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb, & McMillen, 2001).

Several of the students perceived college as an opportunity to improve their financial situation. They made the connection between confident academic identity and financial improvement as a result of their plans for attending college. Bailey implied that her college degree is essential in developing financial stability. She proclaimed, “I am going to Stacey’s Cosmetology School. My plan is to go to Stacey’s, get my license and then get a business degree so I can be making money.” I probed Bailey to speak more about the need to “be making money.” She was quick to respond and added that money is needed to live comfortably or, as she insinuated, to live more comfortably than her current situation.

Jazmine continued this connection between plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity and financial improvement. She stated, “I want to go as far as I can. . . I know I want to be a physical education instructor and that is not a lot of money, but I can be a physical education instructor at a university and get paid tons of money.”

Others commonly connected college with improved stature within society. As Lela asserted, “Uh, I’m looking forward to going to college and getting into nursing or child education field and moving up.” Winton included his remark on the same subject. “I mean, I’m really focused on trying to do something with my life. I’m gonna end up

going to Delaware Valley College, major in National Business and minor in Accounting.”

From their perspective college is seen as a means to improve who they are within the larger context of society. These narratives are critical, especially when the stereotypical view of African American students within a Eurocentric value laden society views them as academically unsuccessful, intellectually inferior, and unable to view college as an avenue for success (Brown, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Ward, 2004, West, 2001).

Most of the participants viewed college as an avenue for independence. Lela acknowledged this with her statement. “When I get out of high school. . . I want to go to Millersville University after I finish attend the local community college for two years. . . major in child education and my fall back is nursing. And after that, I’m thinking about owning my own daycare.” Da-Juan added this regarding independence:

I plan to either go to St. Joseph’s in Philadelphia or either Millersville in Lock Haven. I want to major in business management because, you know, I’m interested in owning my own business, you know, being my own man, depending on myself.

After further inquiry both of these particular participants agreed that college would be an important part in the rite of passage toward adulthood. They viewed their plans for college as an important part of their academic identity as a means to break dependency with others and take responsibility in the development of their personal identity.

A few of the participants viewed attending a four-year educational institution as a prestigious accolade and badge of honor to represent who they are within the context of school, something they were willing to attain and accomplish with great effort. They were not afraid of debunking the stereotype of being successful in school as “acting

white.” Although not all of the participants were admitted to a four-year educational institution directly out of high school, two participants spoke about the alternative paths they would take prior to enrolling in a four-year university. Jazmine spoke about her plans for attending a four-year college. “Well, I thought I was going into the Air Force, but I changed my mind. I’m going to a local community college to get my grades right then transferring to Millersville.” Gerran also provided an alternative plan for entering a four-year post-secondary school. His approach was similar to Jazmines. After receiving a two-year business scholarship to a local community college, Gerran plans to take the basic courses to improve his grades and then transfer to a local four-year state university.

Listening to these students discuss their goals of attending college as a description of their identity as an African American student was very enlightening. All of these participants viewed plans for attending college as a major component of their identity within the context of school. These narratives implied that whether participants viewed college as an avenue for career interest, to improve one’s financial situation, or to further their identity within a societal context school performance and the perception of one’s academic identity is very important; therefore, the belief that attending college for African American students is a critical element of their identity within the context of school.

As Tony Brown (1995), scholar and noted American political analyst, indicates, over the last two decades there has been a rise in the black middle class. As Thompson (2003) alludes “one of the main reasons for these socioeconomic improvements” is the increased enrollment and attendance of African American students in four-year

educational institutions. The stories of these African American students indicate that attending college is an essential element of academic identity. Nonetheless, Howard (2003) illustrates fewer African American students are graduating from college compared to the graduation rate of their white counterparts. Therefore, the exploration of critical elements regarding academic identity through narrative research coupled with current research on academic success of African American college students demonstrates a need for not only further dialogue regarding high school “tracking” practices and racial hegemony within public schools, but also more specifically for discussions concerning pursuit of college and the skills needed to successfully complete college as necessary elements of identity within the context of school.

The Influential Role of Supportive Parents and Family in the Development of Academic Identity

As accountability for schools regarding the achievement of their students continues to increase, the influence of parents and families has become a popular topic in scholarly literature (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Fields-Smith, 2005; Taylor, 2003; Yan, 1999). The general discourse within academia is that parents as well as the extended family play an instrumental part in the development of potential, ability, and performance within school (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). This is found to be especially true regarding the education of African American children (Newman, et al, 2000; Ogbu, 2003; Yang, 1999).

When asked to discuss their experiences as a black student or to describe the development of their academic identity, most of the participants talked about the

influence of supportive parents and family. Bailey spoke in general about how family can either be a positive or negative influence. “My family, I love them. I love everybody to death. . . I think family is a big factor in a lot of people’s lives. If stuff isn’t right with your family or who you’re living with, that can affect you positively or negatively. . . because family can act up too.”

Some of the participants conversed about the need of a supportive family, whether it is within the context of school or not:

I mean they [family] means the world to me. Knowing that you are going to have somebody that has your back, somebody’s always going to be there for you, knowing that if you need anything, your family, they’ll be there for you.
(Winton)

I think, to me they are the most important thing in life. To me, if you don’t have a family or anything like that you’re not going to. . . I don’t feel that you can be as happy or be happy at all without some kind of family. (Andre)

Later, both of these participants explained their remarks further. Winton clarified his meaning of “anything” indicating that he meant pertaining to school related and non-school related things. Andre implied that the lack of support from home regarding school would have a tremendous influence on “who you became later in life after you graduated from school. That is the value your parent places on school can have an effect on your success after school.”

Christina included her thoughts regarding the influence of family. “Family is big. If your family acts one way, nine times out of ten, you are going to act the same way your mom and dad acted. . . So I think that is how that does have a big thing over a child. It

has a big influence, huge.” Captivated by her response, I probed her to speak more about that within the context of education. She implied that if parents don’t value education and are disconnected from school, more than likely the child would embrace those same disengaging values.

These same sentiments displayed by Christina resonate within Javon’s perspective regarding the role of family within an educational context. He remarked, “Family is your backbone. From the time you are born it determines how you live, what you want to be in life. I think family has a lot to do with the drive, the drive to go to school and be successful.”

The narratives of Andre, Winton, Christina and Javon merge together to develop a collective identity of success within the context of school influenced by supportive parents. This noteworthy because some scholars and cultural theorist argue that parents of African American students are not very involved or supportive in the education endeavors of their children (Taylor, 2003; Persell, 1981; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Nonetheless, in supporting the stories told by these participants a second group of educational researchers have found just the opposite, claiming that minority parents are very involved in the educational process of their children (Fields-Smith, 2005; Howard, 2003; Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). These conflicting perspectives confirm the need to further explore mainstream Eurocentric ideals regarding the conceptualization of parental involvement.

When probed to talk more specifically about the influence of a supportive family and ultimately who they were within the context of school, some of the participants told stories about their mothers:

The day that my momma sat me down and talked to me and told me how proud she was of me and that a lot of things that went on in her life. A lot of things that go on with me she never got to experience. Her mom wasn't around like she is for me. She just said that she was really proud of me for doing the things that I do and helping her out. She just said she was really grateful for me and stuff. That really touched me cause my mom has been through a lot in her lifetime. I just think that was really nice when she told me that. We cried and shed a couple of tears. That made me want to achieve more, just for the fact that she told me that and that she looked up to me. That was the most influential moment cause that made me want to strive for the best and make sure that when I have kids I do for them what my momma did for me. She went through so much and I am really thankful for what she did do for me. (Bailey)

My mom basically because of what she has been through as a single parent and she's not even 33 yet. She is only 32 but she'll be 33 May 20 with four kids, me being 18 about to leave and my brother who is 14 is nowhere near responsible. . . she's a person I admire and has had the most impact on me because of the fact that she proves you can get through a whole lot in life and school, even with the biggest barriers in your life and she has shown that to me and my two youngest brothers actually, 7 and 9, because they've gone through a whole lot without a father figure, it hasn't really dawned on my 14- year-old brother because him and his dad were close but when my mom separated because of him being on drugs and everything, it hit him hard so she is struggling with him. It's like he's smart but he makes all F's because he doesn't care and she goes through a whole lot. (Sable)

[My mother] is the most inspirational person in my life and school because she pushes me no matter what. Like she doesn't take no for an answer and no matter what it is like because. . . [Pause] for instance. . . [Pause] like last night it was lightening outside and she wanted me to go dig some holes and put some plants in them and I was like 'Man, I'm going to get struck by lightening.' And she was like, 'No I bought us some plastic shovels.' I was like, 'Are you serious?' And she was like, 'Yeah, go dig the holes.' [Laughter]. . . and so like she always pushes me to do stuff in and out of school. She always finds a way for me to do it no matter what. (Andre)

Other participants told stories about their fathers when describing who has affected their academic identity:

My dad because of where he came from and how successful he is now; there was eight of them altogether and they grew up in the projects and his Mom died when he was 16. Now he is in the Navy. . . he just motivates me to get to that level one day. His drive to get better; to gain more, and achieve more and want more in and out of school. Basically everything he ever wanted he got. (Jalynn)

I would probably say the most influential person on me in school would probably be my dad. My dad influenced me a lot because you know, he's real independent. He taught me a lot about being independent. I would say my dad for being independent. (Da-Juan)

The most encouraging person would probably be my father. . . I just found out about a year and a half ago, that he is not my biological father. I just found out that, so, I think knowing. . . [Pause] me just finding that out was a big part. . . What was my real father like? I mean, I've met him once, so, I mean, I don't really wonder because he's my dad, he's been caring for me, he's the person that signed my birth certificate, he's the father that I know. I mean, the other guy is basically just a sperm donor to me, I mean, I don't have, I'm not mad at him or have any negativity towards him but I mean, he's not my father. My father is the father that I live with and been living with for all of my life. He's the only father I've ever known. (Javon)

Still others replied telling stories about other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even cousins. These narratives support a cultural framework of meaning regarding “fictive kin” and “community kinships” and their influence in identity development of children. “Fictive kin” or “community kinships” often refer to the role of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members who share in the parenting responsibilities of African American children (Evans-Everett,

2000). Below are responses from those who believed that their surrogate parents or “fictive kin” had influenced who they became within the context of school:

My aunt, my mother’s older sister, I would say my mom as she is really topnotch. She is the main lady in my life but next to her is my aunt. If you hear her life story you would say ‘Oh my gosh, how is she doing all that she has done?’ It used to be really hard. She had two kids when she was 13 and it was a mess but she straightened up. She just recently, last year, got her masters degree. I am really proud of her. I could say that if I go through anything in life or at school I just look at my aunt and she would just lift me up. The way I see it there is no way possible that I could have done what she has done. (Melanie)

My grandmother, she, I mean, she was just an awesome person. I mean, she’s not here anymore. She passed away about a year ago. I mean she just, I mean, she pretty much kept her foot in my butt every chance she got. You know, every time she find out I got in trouble at school, like she stayed in Roxboro. So she would get my granddaddy to drive her way down there just, you know, to put her hand on my hind parts. You know, she kept me in check. I mean, that’s one of my bestest friends in the world. I mean, every time I had a problem, you know, I could call her up, we’d talk for hours and hours. (Odell)

My granddaddy, he was a landscaping man but he did stuff around like, he was always busy, he always had work. . . [Pause] he had five kids. He provided for his family and he didn’t have nothing. My grandma, she ain’t worked so my granddaddy, he was always busy but at that same time even though my cousins and everything he spent the most time with me because he knew that I was going to do something with my life. All my other cousins, I mean, they grew up, doing things they weren’t supposed to do. So, I mean, he always felt like that I was something special and knowing that he felt that strong about me, I mean, that guided me, like through my whole life including school. (Winton)

My grandma. . . she really influenced me because she’s seen a lot of bad things and she just keeps me going straight, keeps me forward. (Deshane)

Everybody doesn’t get along but the real close people to me are my mom, my aunt, and my uncle. They have always had to stick together; it’s always been them three. That is basically the closest family that I have. . . Over the years we

have been through a lot but they stuck together no matter what. My mother's step mom, I call her my grandmother, because that is basically the only mom that my mom knew so she's played a big role in all our lives. She tries to be there for us as much as possible. She has helped out the family a lot with the children, and my aunts and uncles going through stuff, but she was always there for us.
(Bailey)

The surprising aspect about this collection of narratives is that everyone spoke positively about how a parent or extended family member had influenced who he/she was within the context of school. Contrary to popular opinion these participants have a positive construction of family members as active participants in their lives and who ultimately influenced the development of their academic identity. This is critical because these narratives suggest that educators need to be mindful about misconceptions regarding minority families and reexamine their conceptualization of parental involvement. Failure to recognize a more holistic perspective pertaining to parental involvement according to these students can have a profound effect on ability, potential, and performance within the context of school. This profound effect on ability, potential, performance also determines the decisions these African American students will make concerning their identity within the context of school.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, analyzing data is a meticulous process that requires "testing, clarifying, and deepening" an understanding regarding any given phenomenon (Mishler, 1991, p. 277). In this study the analysis process provided the researcher an opportunity to explore the complexities of socially constructed realities and present those findings in a more palatable manner. The analysis of these findings

resulted in the weaving together of direct quotes, researcher notes, and scholarly literature.

Furthermore, the goal of Chapter V was to explore the educational experiences and academic identity of sixteen African American students and the patterns observed in and across their narratives. I incorporated the constant comparative method that included unitizing, categorizing, and connecting the narratives of these students. The result of this process is the formation of five themes that merged together direct quotes, researcher notes, and scholarly literature. The themes that emerged from the data are: 1) the significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity; 2) the function of school diversity in developing academic identity; 3) the nurturing role of teachers influencing academic identity; 4) the development of a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity; 5) plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity; and 6) the influential role of supportive parents and family in the development of academic identity. In the next chapter I will revisit the research questions, discuss the strengths and limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for future research, leading and teaching.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Introduction

“No challenge has been more daunting than that of enhancing the educational achievement of African American students. Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community.”
(Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. ix)

Gloria Ladson-Billing’s quote here describes what I consider to be the American Imperative as we move into the twenty-first century, the achievement of African American students. According to the latest achievement data, African American students are graduating from high school with the equivalence of a junior high education and are far behind their white counterparts on standardized achievement tests (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Enhancing the educational achievement of African American students has become an issue of race, equity, and most importantly, an issue of social justice. A healthy academic identity is necessary and essential when trying to enhance full and optimal development of our young students within the context of school so that they may become productive members of a democratic society (Campbell-Whatley, 2000; Grantham, 2003; Howard, 2003).

In this dissertation I examined the educational experiences and academic identity of African American students through the exploration of personal narratives. This study

was designed to provide a forum for which these students could present their perspective regarding this topic. Therefore, it is not the intent of the researcher to develop a new theory or to test a previously constructed theory. Consistent with narrative research, this study intended to present a picture that captures the construction, representation, and interpretation of stories told by African American students regarding their educational experience and development of academic identity.

In Chapter V, I analyzed the narratives of the sixteen African American students who participated in this study and the interpretations regarding their experiences and identity development within the context of school. I incorporated the constant comparative method that included unitizing, categorizing, and connecting the narratives of these students. I explored these narratives attending to patterns, parallel experiences, and common voices as individuals and then collectively as a group. The result of this process is the formation of five themes that merged together direct quotes, researcher notes and scholarly literature. The themes that emerged from the data are: 1) the significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity; 2) the function of school diversity in developing academic identity; 3) the nurturing role of teachers influencing academic identity; 4) the development of a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity; 5) plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity; and 6) the influential role of supportive parents and family in the development of academic identity.

In this chapter I will continue the dialogue regarding the findings from their narratives by revisiting the research questions that guided this study, discussing the

strengths and limitations of this research, and present implications for further research, leading, and teaching.

Revisiting the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do African American students at a small rural high school describe their schooling experience?

There are numerous variables that contribute to a positive educational experience. As Howard (2003) indicates “it is critical to recognize the role that parent and teacher expectations, race, and socioeconomic status play” in the development of a positive educational experience where all students have the security to grow as both a student and civil human being (p. 8).

When asked to tell stories about their experiences as a student growing-up through school, the participants interpreted this question by describing what they did not experience. Both male and female students depicted experiences from a socio-cultural perspective that were free from race and racism. Although they did not deny being black, this physical, cultural, and intellectual characteristic was thought to be less than pivotal in their experience within the context of school.

Collectively these narratives joined two distinct elements of the multidimensional psychological self, academic identity and racial identity. The belief these students had regarding their academic ability, potential, and performance within a socially constructed environment is shaped through the differences and divisions between human beings that are consistently used as an indicator for the unequal treatment of others, race. Therefore, based on the various stories told by these participants regarding their experiences as a

black student, a natural connection develops between academic identity and Cross' Model of Racial Identity. William Cross Jr. (1991) explores black identity development in four distinct stages: (1) pre-encounter; (2) encounter; (3) immersion-emersion; and (4) internalization. The pre-encounter stage begins as black children start to adopt and embrace values of white mainstream society. The encounter stage is described as an attack on the earliest formations of black identity by an event(s) and the personalization of that event(s). The third stage, immersion-emersion, is characterized by certain aspects of the black culture becoming more valued while facets of white mainstream society become more oppositional. A conflict then evolves between the "old" and "new" identity. Finally, the last stage discussed by William Cross Jr. is internalization, or the resolution to the identity conflict, which is illustrated by full emersion and embracing of one's new black identity.

These stories indicate that all of the participants were still in the pre-encounter stage of Cross's Model of Racial Identity. None of the narratives collected suggested that the participants viewed being African American as a pivotal characteristic that would lead to a critical event or series of events encouraging resistance to internalized white mainstream values. Therefore, the participants did not discuss their experiences as an African American student being any different from other students because they had yet to be exposed to racially salient situations. Essentially, the students have thus far not observed any experiences based on race because they have been taught not to understand the significance of race in their life. In essence, these students have been indoctrinated by educational institutions to accept themselves as the "other" based on "secondhand

information. . . distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes, and left incomplete” (Tatum, 1997, p. 4). According to Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (1993) these educational institutions construct a curriculum that has “historically encoded power, privilege, and marginality in our public schools;” a Eurocentric curriculum that is supported by policies, practices, and discourses that silence the “voices” of African American students (p. 1).

Research Question 2: How do African American students in a small rural high school view their academic ability, potential, and performance?

A positive construction of who one is within the context of school, or one’s academic identity, has been linked to academic achievement. Students who have a positive construct of who they are within the context of school appear to be more successful in their educational endeavors while students who have a more negative construction of their academic identity tend to be less successful in school (House, 2000; Marsh, 1990).

In this study, when both male and female students were asked to discuss their academic ability, all of these participants, regardless of their gender, had a positive construction of who they were within the context of school. They all used adjectives such as “good”, “pretty good”, “average”, “above average”, and “smart” to describe themselves as a student. This was typically followed by a proclamation of one’s G.P.A. (Grade Point Average), course load, extra-curricula involvement, and general thoughts regarding performance in school.

One of the major differences in the narratives between African American male and female students when describing their abilities as a student was in the area of non-

academic involvement. The female students regardless of their socioeconomic status, achievement level, or academic track continued their dialogue regarding academic abilities, potential, or performance by describing their membership to clubs, organizations, and volunteer work. The male students continued their discourse in this area by describing athletic potential and their interest or involvement in sports. The “voices” of these participants are patterned around stereotypical views or socially constructed roles associated with gender.

The stories of these participants reveal that how they viewed identity within the context of school influenced how they pursued certain educational and non-educational endeavors. As Chesley and Lyons (2004) indicate, decisions regarding educational and non-educational endeavors for African American students can either be structurally or psychologically constraining. Therefore it is important to remember that race, socioeconomic status, gender, pop-culture, and educational indoctrination from kindergarten through twelfth grade do have a tremendous bearing on one’s academic identity (Grantham & Ford, 2003). These narratives support other findings that suggest African American students have a positive construction of who they are within the context of school and that there is awareness regarding the influence of factors that shape this identity (Howard, 2003). Although every participant was confident in his or her abilities, according to their narratives gender was a more salient factor in the development of their academic identity. As previously mentioned, the female students spoke about their abilities, potential, and performance in school by highlighting their G.P.A and by discussing their involvement in clubs, rigorous course work, and volunteer activities.

The male students offered a differing perspective about their abilities, potential, and performance by discussing their interest or involvement in athletic activities. Essentially, school personnel must understand the important relationship between gender and academic identity in addition to how policies and practices socialize students, especially African American, male students with regards to abilities, potential, and engagement in school.

Research Question 3: Who and/or what has had the greatest influence in the formation of the academic identity in African American students who attend a small rural high school?

Collectively the narratives of these sixteen African American students imply that the teachers, parents, and community kinships play an instrumental in the development of academic identity. This idea coincides with the general discourse within academia regarding this topic as it specifically relates to African American students (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Howard, 2003; Kemp & Hall, 1992; Newman, Meyers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith 2000; Ogbu, 2003).

Both male and female students spoke about influencing academic identity through the nurturing role of teachers. In addition to the influential role of nurturing teachers, several students also addressed the influential role of supportive parents and family in the development of academic identity. These observations are a sign that African American students place a high value on family connecting their influence to ability, potential, and performance within school.

As African American students continue to be labeled as low performing because of struggles with standardized tests it is imperative that parents, guardians, and school personnel continue to strengthen the African American students' identity within the context of school by positively reinforcing their abilities as learners beyond standardized test. Although African American students may view the physical nature of their surrounding as an obstacle to educational success many clearly understand the significance others, especially teachers, family members and community kinships, have in shaping identity (Taylor, 2003). Collectively the "voices" of these African American students indicate that nurturing the learner is just as important as teaching the learner. This is critical information as our nation's public school systems continue to move forward in an era of high stakes accountability where pacing guides replace personal relationships.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between academic identity, educational experiences, and/or achievement of these African American students?

Negative educational experiences can have a devastating effect on the development of academic identity and the achievement of African American students (Nieto, 2004). Therefore, exploring the narratives of marginalized and silenced students is critical in understanding the relationship between educational experiences, the development of academic identity and student achievement.

As mentioned in this chapter, both male and female students were asked to discuss their academic abilities. All of these participants, regardless of their gender, had a positive construction of who they were within the context of school. Although race and

racism were a principal concern in describing their educational experience, few of the participants perceived their blackness as contributing to any negative experiences. As denoted earlier these participants did not discuss their experiences as an African American student being any different from other students because they had yet to be exposed to racially salient situations. In accordance with Cross's Model of Racial Identity these students have thus far not observed any experiences based on race because they have been taught not to understand the significance of race in their life.

Nonetheless, according to narratives by some participants, it is apparent that transitioning between schools consequently created a rupture in their identity development within the context of school. Researchers have clearly identified a link between school transitioning and identity development. Student achievement and academic identity is tremendously influenced in a negative manner by multiple transitions during a child's years as a student (Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991).

This trend became troublesome for many of these students as they needed to resolve conflicts between the "new" and "old" self. The end result of the negotiation between the "new" and "old" identity within the context of school obviously had a negative influence on the educational experience and academic identity of these participants.

Each of these narratives that describe multiple transitions also indicated that there were problems and conflicts in school that affected their overall educational experience. For example, Jazmine, Lela, and Odell, transitioning between schools also meant

changing and re-developing who they became within the context of school. Initially, these participants openly talked about the problems and conflicts associated with multiple transitions between schools, however, they were not the only participants who were mobile during middle and high school.

Altogether, eight of the sixteen participants had more than one transition during middle or high school. Jazmine and Gerran both displayed the highest mobility rate within a single grading category. Jazmine attended four high schools while Gerran attended three different middle schools. Other participants with multiple transitions are Odell, Da-Juan, Dallen, and Deshane who each attended two middle schools and two high schools. Finally, there is Lela who attended two middle schools and Winton who attended two high schools. During follow-up conversations these students discussed how their attitude, grades, and perceptions regarding school declined after each move. According to these eight students each one noticed a significant drop in their grades after a transition between schools at the same grade level. Six participants who experienced more than one transition during high school had a lower self-concept when describing their abilities, potential, and performance in school. Five of the participants who encountered transitions at the high school level are considered lower level students according to comprehensive standardized tests.

These students were forced to reconstruct on numerous occasions their identity within the physical, emotional, and social elements of a new school environment. Their inability to cope with this identity crisis, or the negotiation between the “new” and “old” self resulted in negative educational experiences, subsequent decline in achievement

levels, and a rupture in the development of academic identity; therefore, educational experience and academic identity were viewed as social constructs intricately woven into educational achievement.

Strengths and Limitations

A hallmark of all good qualitative research is being able to identify the strengths and limitations of the study. I view intertextuality, or the more humanistic aspect of the triangulation process, that seeks similar narratives from differing perspectives as a strong point in this study. By utilizing in the analysis process intertextuality this research project limits the creation of what Grumet (1991, p. 72) identifies as an “authoritative autobiography” and what Casey (1993, p. 24) considers as a “fictive composite individual.” Seeking differing perspectives fragments a dogmatic narrative and argues against stereotypical views associated with stories captured from a single perspective. In short, differing perspectives discloses the various “eyes” upon which the world is internalized (Greene, 1991).

Intertextuality adds integrity to the “voice” and as Casey (1993, pg. 25) states constructs “a social space where the collective creators of a discourse can engage in group conversations.” These different perspectives for this study were gender, economic status, and standardized academic ability levels. Specifically, eight of the students were male and eight were female; nine qualified for free/reduced lunch and seven did not; according to standardized tests ten students were considered high-achieving and six were not. These contextual factors undoubtedly influenced their narratives, thus strengthening the intertextuality of their stories.

Another area of strength for this study is in the selection of the participants. The selection process utilized networking and chaining as avenues to determine participants. This strength is an important aspect of the research process because it allowed me, as the researcher, to rely more on others and less on my biases in determining who would become a participant.

Next, I viewed the interview protocol as a strength. The interview protocol is specifically designed to be a very broad, open-ended question that would allow for the telling of a “story.” The interview protocol and investigative probes provided me, as the researcher, the opportunity and flexibility to explore an array of topics with more than one participant using the same procedures. This type of questioning allowed the participants to talk about what is important to them. In the end, the participants constructed their own interpretation to the question and investigative probes which is presented in the patterns of the voice and through direct quotes allowing the readers a more subjective lens.

Finally, I viewed my role as a teacher/administrative intern at the school as a strong point of the study. Serving in this capacity minimized the risks associated with power for the participants and aided in the construction of an open environment in which participants felt comfortable sharing. I am not a stranger to these participants, I have worked and lived in the community for several years and they are volunteer participants that suggest a positive perception concerning their involvement in the study. As an administrative intern I had no responsibilities or duties concerning their grade level.

There was a level of trust and a strong sense of rapport between my participants and I because of relationships established within and outside of the context of school.

My position as a white researcher, exploring African American student's experiences, I view as a limitation. As a result of the history of our country, I felt it would be impossible to address every aspect regarding the issue of race; nonetheless, I was sensitive to racial terminology during the interview, showed genuine interest when students spoke, and displayed a sense of respect during our interactions. I came to the realization that my life experiences have not been the same life experiences as African Americans. As a result of my "whiteness" I am an outsider to certain aspects regarding the cultural view that black students have towards education.

I view the relatively small sample size of this study as a limitation of this work. The ability to generalize these findings to a larger population of African American students would be difficult. Nonetheless, as Howard (2003) indicates, this type of limitation of qualitative research does not weaken this study's implication. Maxwell (2005) asserts that internal generalization is "clearly a key issue" for qualitative research and that "the value of a qualitative study may depend on its *lack* of external generalizability in the sense of being representative of a larger population" that others may consider as an atypical case (p. 115). Narrative research does not seek to predict or create a theory, but its main focus is on description (Casey, 1993; Creswell, 1994). On a continuum of total objectivity to total subjectivity, narrative research is situated in the middle combining the direct quotes of the participants with the interpretation of the

researcher to illustrate a group's voice regarding what is important to them (Casey, 1993; 1995-96).

All the participants were graduating seniors attending Horace Mann High School which can be seen as a limitation because these were successful students meeting many of the standardized obstacles that awaited them during their educational journey. This factor combined with the non-random sample of participants lends itself to the probability of bias in the stories constructed. All of the participants were from the same geographical region. Despite a variety of educational experiences, Horace Mann has a distinct culture unto itself. Therefore, this study is one perspective of a nation-wide phenomenon from one geographical location. Certainly, the culture of this school and geographical location impacted data collection.

Implications for Future Research

Each of the sixteen students who participated in this study graduated from Horace Mann High School. This factor combined with the non-random sample of participants represents a limited portrayal of the African American student perspective regarding educational experience and academic identity. Therefore, I ended up with a sample of African American students who were successful in school according to graduation standards. Future exploration in this topic should include a wider range of participants from various races and ethnicities including students who are not successful in school according to graduation requirements.

Furthermore, this study focuses on the perspectives of students from a small rural high school in the Southeast. Geography and location then are important factors to

consider for future research on this topic. Horace Mann is located in the Southeast part of the United States; therefore, future studies should explore the perspectives of African American students from various geographical locations around the United States. Also, forthcoming research should explore a variety of perspectives of those African American students who attend schools in larger urban and suburban locations.

Finally, there are a small number of studies using narrative methodology to explore the educational experiences and academic identity development of students. Narrative analysis reveals patterns and perspectives through intertextuality and the exploration of silences, slippages, and selectivities. This method of inquiry provides a “rich source of detailed information that can be analyzed in a variety ways,” as a result this flexible approach to data analysis proves to be a significant tool in educational research (McIntosh, 2004, p.114).

Implications for Leading and Teaching

It is apparent from the narratives of these sixteen African American students that there is a clear link between educational experience, academic identity, and achievement. The complexities of this link are as intricate as the behaviors, ideas, and interests that construct and define the multidimensional psychological self as characterized by Erikson (1968), Goffman (1959), and Slattery (1995). Nonetheless, the primary objective of this analysis was not to unravel the precise complexities of this link, but rather to afford these students a forum for which they can describe the cyclic nature of the relationship between identity construction, educational experience, and achievement. Although the perspectives presented in this study are limited to these sixteen participants, their

narratives provide insight into how African American students perceive the construction of their identity within context of school and identify the factors that shape such an identity. As suggested by the stories of these participants, the following are key implications for leading and teaching of students: 1) college “tracking” for everyone; 2) establishing a mentor/mentee program with racial, cultural, and identity awareness; and 3) courageous conversations about race, culture, identity development within the context of school. These implications are critical for the development of a positive identity for marginalized students within the context of school.

College “Tracking” for Everyone

If transforming society, eliminating disparities, and increasing awareness regarding issues of social justice is to be a concern and possibility for the field of education as these constructs pertain to race, then providing rigorous curriculum options and college tracking for everyone should be a primary concern. Offering college “tracking” for everyone eliminates ability “tracking” based on culturally incongruent standardized test, increases heterogeneous grouping, and fosters a climate of higher expectations. Support for this key consideration may be found within the following three themes which the participants discussed as influencing their academic identity: 1) significance of high expectations; 2) the function of school diversity; and 3) plans for attending college.

Many African American students are shortchanged with a “dumbing down” of the curriculum, culturally incongruent modes of assessment, culturally irrelevant curricula, and stereotypical images of disadvantaged home lives (Banks, 2006; Brown, 1995; Hale,

2004; Lyons & Chesley, 2004). One urban Superintendent noted his district's failure to expose many black students to "demanding curriculum." He noted that rigorous courses are not for the elite they are "for the prepared" (Grier, 2002, p. 17-18).

The College Board (2000) has reported that less than seven percent of the Black student body population in the United States is enrolled in at least one Advance Placement Course. This statistic is alarming because more than thirty percent of public schools' population is African American. A special report in *Issues of Higher Education*, by George and Harrison (2001) emphasizes a strong connection between academic rigor and high school and college achievement. This information becomes quite significant, in that most minority students, especially African Americans, lack representation in classes of high academic rigor and this under-representation may be affecting their success in school and beyond graduation.

The stories that support the theme regarding plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity is critical in supporting the consideration of college "tracking" for everyone. Many students noted this conceptual understanding in the description of their academic identity as an African American student. Part of who these students are included aspirations for attending college. Some students even discussed how their educational experiences had affected this particular aspect of their identity within the context of school.

These narratives demonstrate that plans for attending college are an essential element of academic identity. The data indicate that developing a positive self-concept of who one is within the context of school involves acquiring plans for attending college as

an element of that identity. This is crucial because to a large extent plans for attending college are already predetermined before students even reach high school as a result of “tracking” practices in elementary and middle school.

These “tracking” practices in elementary and middle school often use standardized test as mode to measure intelligence and determine ones educational path through school. Standardized tests operate under the assumption that a child’s mental, physical, and social competence can be accurately measured. Supporting standardized tests that operate under this misconception and broad assumption would challenge a century of research regarding the psychological foundations of a child’s development within an educational context, brain-based learning findings, and theories supporting multiple intelligences.

This predetermined “track” continues as one enters and continues through high school. This practice often marginalizes African American students. This statement is supported by data that indicates a lower number of African American students enrolled in classes that prepare them for college or to pursue college as an option. This same data indicates a larger number of African American students registered in classes of with lower academic rigor (Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb, & McMillen, 2001). This again becomes a significant issue as courses taken in high school become a predictor of success in college and improved stature in society (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Thompson, 2002). Therefore, understanding that plans for attending college as an essential element of academic identity provides evidence that all students should be provided with access and opportunity to pursue the benefits afforded through college “tracking.”

Fostering a climate of high expectations is another positive outcome for guaranteeing college “tracking” for everyone. Schools play a critical role in the shaping the identity of students within the context of school through the establishment of expectations. Scholarly literature in the field of education has shown a clear link between expectation and performance (Benard, 1995; Schilling & Schilling, 1999). Classical psychological studies label this cognitive and affective transformation from bad to good based on the expectations demanded upon them as the Pygmalion effect. The opposite of this theory would be that lower expectations in the classroom would yield a reduction in student achievement. This is noteworthy information when research has shown that African American students are over represented in classes that do not prepare them for college (Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb, & McMillen, 2001).

The narratives from these participants that support the theme regarding the significance of high expectations in shaping academic identity is important in recommending college “tracking” for everyone. Their texts emphasized how high expectations, or the lack thereof, is a major aspect of the school environment that influences the formation of academic identity. Students also indicated how the negative influence of lowered expectations within a school culture impacted learning and ultimately academic identity.

Not only did the lack of expectations affect academic identity but for some students race becomes a critical social construct that can damage identity within the context of school. The issue of race adds complexity to the problem because the lack of expectations is generally associated with the mainstream misconception that blacks do

not perform well academically. This misconception based on standardized testing results ultimately evokes behaviors that lead to the development of an oppositional identity for Blacks students which views academic success as “acting white.” Thus the processes of developing a positive academic identity are delayed.

The fostering of high expectations within the school environment is also critical in motivating students to perform at their highest levels and improving achievement. Believing that the level of expectations demanded on a student can transform cognitive, affective, and social domains that influence achievement provides support that all students, especially students who have been historically marginalized can benefit from college “tracking.”

Finally, we learn from these students that part of their identity within the context of school is based on the negotiation between *self* and various external factors in the midst of the socially constructed environment of public schools. The hegemonic nature of the public school environment, in essence, teaches students of color that they are in fact the “other.” While most adolescents search for answers to the question “Who am I?” Students of color search for answers to the question “What does it mean to be black?” Therefore, race becomes an issue in identity development based on the perceptions and perspectives of indoctrinated Eurocentric ideals. These perceptions and perspective of indoctrinated Eurocentric ideals contributes to an ideology of anti-intellectualism for African American students (Brown, 1995; West, 2001).

This skewed perspective regarding ones intelligence based on the color of skin is then the result of competition between the social constructs of school and culture. This

perspective disturbs the development of a positive identity within the context of school for blacks.

Nonetheless, one could infer from the narratives that support the theme regarding the significance of school diversity in shaping academic identity is crucial aspect in building support for the consideration of college “tracking” for everyone. Their stories reveal that diversity within the school environment contributed to the development of a positive academic identity because of the lack of exoticness associated with the “other.” For these African American students attending school in a more heterogeneous school environment became beneficial for themselves and the development of their identity than attending a homogeneous school environment.

The historical and socio-cultural lens has typically stereotyped and presented black students as the “other” within the context of school. As a result of this perspective a positive academic identity for African American students has become mutated and distorted ultimately affecting achievement in a negative manner.

The participants in this study believed that the influence of a culturally diverse student body has allowed their academic identities to develop more naturally, in part, because of multiple “others.” The presence of multiple cultural identities have lessened the tension traditionally associated between dominant white identity and subordinate black identity that has splintered much the American narratives throughout history. The need to develop oppositional identities such as “acting white” to hide academic success or “acting black” to protect them from racism and stereotyping simple was non-existent (Tatum, 1997).

Through the narratives of these participants developing school and classroom environments that are more heterogeneous is beneficial in developing a positive identity within the context of school. Exposure to multiple “others” has allowed these students to appreciate differences, evolve more naturally identities within the context of school, and develop pro-social behaviors to respond effectively to racism within the context of school. This is vital information because not only does providing college “tracking” for all eliminate ability “tracking” practices it increase expectations and creates a more heterogeneous classroom environment. For that reason then the significance of school diversity in shaping academic identity offers evidence that suggest (re)integrating classroom environments is beneficial for all students and can occur through college “tracking” for all.

Mentor/Mentee Program with Racial, Cultural, and Identity Awareness

Adolescence is a critical period during the life of young teenagers where decision regarding the developing, adopting, and deleting of identities is at its most critical stages. Much of what teenagers learn about themselves, “Who am I? Who can I be? What do I want to become?” occurs within the confines and curriculum of the American public school system. Recommending a mentor/mentee program with racial, cultural, and identity awareness encourages positive identity development, allows provisions for race and gender role models, and can improve positive personal relationships and one’s conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school. Information from these participants found within the themes of influencing academic identity through the nurturing role of teachers, developing a positive conceptual framework regarding the

meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity support this key recommendation. Other grounding for this recommendation can also be found in the answers to research questions that described the lack of exposure to racially salient situations questions, provided information that gender awareness and nurturing relationships were significant factors in identity development.

In the era of high stakes accountability created by the No Child Left Behind Act teachers across America have shifted their focus away from the student and place much of their attention on teaching to the “test” (Stipek, 2006). This tragedy has occurred despite common knowledge that teachers have enormous influence on the development of a student’s academic identity through the building of positive personal relationships. It is also known that the absence of personal teacher-student relationships during the educational process is a contributing factor to their school failure, especially in minority students (Kemp & Hall, 1992; Lee, 1999). Combined together this information becomes quite important, in that the focal point of teaching now revolves around the “test” instead of the student.

The narratives that supported the theme of influencing academic identity through the nurturing role of teachers is vital in support for the recommendation of developing a mentor/mentee program with racial, cultural, identity, awareness. Collectively these students commented on how the nurturing characteristic is an important aspect of teacher’s personal qualities. Several also spoke about the importance of personal teacher-student relationship as something that affected their identity development within the context of school. Nurturing teachers develop a special relationship based on a caring

attitude, never-ending support, and refusal to accept failure as indicated by these narratives.

Based on their discourse it is apparent that academic identity is influenced by individuals who develop nurturing relationships with them. Their stories point out that developing a positive academic identity involves the development of relationships with parents, teachers, and others who care about them. This is critical because to large extent school policies, practices, and procedures have evolved over time to hinder the development of such relationships.

The disappearance of such relationships is important as scholarly literature and the “voices” of these participants point out the important role nurturing relationships can have on the development of their identity within the context of school (Kemp & Hall, 1992; Lee, 1999; Stipek, 2006). Therefore, becoming more informed regarding the influence of academic identity through the nurturing role of others provides support that all students can be afforded a greater opportunity to establish more positive personal relationships and develop a more positive identity within the context of school through a mentor/mentee program.

Strengthening the value an individual places on school and education is another positive outcome for developing a mentor/mentee program that focuses on race, culture, and identity development within the context of school. From these narratives it is apparent that school personnel and school culture play a vital role in how one defines and develops meaning regarding school. A strong self-image within the context of school,

elicits a higher value assigned to the meaning of school in African American students which in turn has a reciprocal effect on achievement (Campbell-Whatley & Comer 2000).

Participants in this study continually described how important it is to have a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school as a means to mold academic identity. One can infer from the data that these African American students see great value in the meaning of school. Therefore, developing a mentor/mentee program that would assist in the molding of a positive identity within the context of school is an important consideration. A program of this sorts will also allow for exploration into various cultural frameworks regarding the value of school while permitting students and teachers the opportunity to investigate their own conceptual understanding regarding the meaning of school.

In the end, who one becomes within the context of school (academic identity) will influence who one becomes at the end of the formal schooling process and in the real-world (personal identity). For that reason, the conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school affects a student's decisions concerning ability, potential, and performance within and outside the context of school. This supports the need for a mentor/mentee program with cultural awareness that can provide opportunities to explore, operationalize, and rehearse a positive conceptualization regarding the meaning of school.

Ultimately, we learn from this collection of narratives that the students have thus far not observed or participated in any experiences in which race becomes a salient factor because they have been taught not to understand the significance of race in their life.

According to Beverly Tatum (1997, p.4), these participants have been indoctrinated by an educational institution that urges color-blindness. When asked to tell stories about their experiences as a student growing-up through school, the participants interpreted this question by describing what they did not experience. Both male and female students depicted experiences from this color-blind perspective.

Opposite this issue regarding race, is gender. A critical difference observed in the narratives of African American male and female students when describing their abilities as a student in the area of non-academic involvement. Although both male and female participants positively described who they are within the context of school, they each presented a different view in the area of non-academic involvement, based on their gender roles.

A majority of the female students regardless of their socioeconomic status, achievement level, or academic track, continued their dialogue regarding academic abilities, potential, or performance by describing their membership to clubs, organizations, and volunteer work. Male students typically described their non-academic involvement in terms of athletic involvement.

It is clear from the narratives of these participants that how they viewed identity within the context of school influenced how they pursued certain educational endeavors. Although every participant was confident in his or her abilities, it appeared that gender was a more salient factor than race in the development of their academic identity. It is important to remember that schools have the ability to socialize students with regards race, socio-economic status, gender, and pop-culture ideology from kindergarten through

twelfth grade and that these socialization patterns have a tremendous bearing on one's academic identity.

Essentially, there is an important relationship between race, gender, and academic identity. It is critical that schools explore how policies and practices socialize students with regards to abilities, potential, and engagement in school. As implied through the narratives of these participants, developing a mentor/mentee program that utilizes race and gender role models to explore identity development within the context of school can assist in the growth of positive personal relationships. A program of this nature can improve one's conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school is also support for this recommendation.

As suggested by Sabrina Zirkel (2002) race and gender role models provide possibilities pertaining to vocational opportunities, academic pursuits, and identity development as is relates to one's social group. Within the construct of education race and gender role models serve as positive examples in school not to mention out in the community (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Race and gender role models provide valuable information with regards to "people like me." The value of such a mentor/mentee program is immeasurable as it allows adolescents the opportunity to explore the social constructs of race, culture, and identity through a critical lens that encourages and facilitates the development of positive self-concepts within the context of school.

Courageous Conversations about Race, Culture, Identity Development

Within the Context of School

When examining the educational experiences and identity development of a particular group of students, the issue of race and culture always evolves into a principal concern. Numerous studies have sought to make the connection between race, identity, educational experience, and achievement. However, few of these studies have been able to provide a useful framework for “pointing out the obvious—that we have not quite figured out how to educate all children well” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, pg. xiv). We know that there are disparities in achievement based on race and socioeconomic status. How do we eliminate such disparities?

This can be accomplished by having more courageous conversations about race, culture, and identity development within the context of school from our leaders, teachers, parents and students. All school stakeholders must be willingly and confidently able to discuss race, racism, and education (Howard, 2003; Singleton & Linton, 2006). This type of dialogue encourages one to consider, construct, and conceptualize their own ideological perspectives regarding people they deem as “other.” These conversations are critical as silencing, myths, and conflicts with Eurocentric values hinders the ability, potential, and performance of those viewed as the “other” within the context of school.

Several authors have written about the devastating affects of silencing as it pertains to marginalized students in public schools (Fine, 1987; Delpit, 1993; Weis, & Fine, 1993). It negatively influences the development of a positive self-concept within the context of schools, hinders appropriate educational experiences, and leads to declines

in achievement. A number of the participants from this study inferred that they had been indoctrinated within a public school system that encouraged silencing within the “voice” of black students. Silencing is observable in the narratives discussing their experiences as a black student in school. Students were taught to view their education through a color-blind lens. These African American students have been trained by a system to remain quiet and not challenge the status quo as a result of skin color.

The general discourse within academia as well as this study is that teachers, parents, and extended family play an instrumental part in the achievement of their children (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Nonetheless, myths and stereotypical images of disadvantages home lives have invalidated any positive support of African American parents (Brown, 1995; Persell, 1981; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 1965; Ward, 2004). The narratives told by these participants claim that minority parents are very supportive and involved in their lives.

Another common myth is that African American students fail to have a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school (Ferguson, 2003). Research has shown a link between having a positive outlook regarding the meaning of school and perceptions pertaining to achievement. Typically, a negative self-concept regarding achievement is often associated with a lower value placed on the meaning of school. Therefore, defining school or creating a positive conceptual framework regarding the meaning of school becomes a powerful influence in shaping academic identity (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). As a result, how one defines school then

determines who that person will become within the context of school. Thus, collectively the positive conceptual framework of participants in this study regarding the meaning of school as noted in following dialogue opposes the common myth that blacks students fail to value school. Hence, school stakeholders should be mindful regarding (mis)conceptions, (mis)understandings, and (mis)information regarding race, culture, and gender in an effort to dispel myths and stereotypes regarding those labeled as “other.”

Many of the myths and stereotypical images that surround African American students are the result of an identity conflict between “self” and “others.” Understanding that the negotiation between the “self” and “others” is problematic for ethnic groups because of cultural hegemony practiced by mainstream society, therefore, schools, teachers, parents, and students need to make a concentrated effort to become more familiar with the development and fruition of what Erikson (1968) described as an identity crisis. It is the competition between the socially constructed concepts of school and culture that disturbs the development of a positive academic identity. This development becomes even more complicated for African Americans when individual, racial, cultural, and school identities are incongruent (Howard, 2003). As a group, the text from this study which supports the six major themes contradicts the popular Eurocentric view that African American students are academically unsuccessful, intellectually inferior, fail to value school and do not have supportive, involved parents.

Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton (2006), educational consultants and co-authors of the book *Courageous Conversations About Race*, provide a useful framework for more courageous conversations about race, culture, identity development within the context of

school from our leaders, teachers, and students. This framework is divided into three factors: passion, persistence, and practice that focus on (re)defining, (re)building, and (re)acting upon these conversations that center on race.

Mainstream culture views schools as micro-societies, in that society is a reflection of education, and education is a reflection of society (Joseph, Bravmann, Windschitl, Mikel, & Green, 2000). Therefore, from Dewey's (1922) standpoint, our courageous conversations about race, culture, identity development within the context of school from our leaders, teachers, and students "must be the engine of social transformation" that is needed to eliminate disparities and improve social justice on all levels of society (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. xv).

Summary

This dissertation explores the educational experiences and development of academic identity from the perspective of sixteen African American students graduating from Horace Mann, a small diverse rural high school located in the Southeast. As mentioned the achievement of African American students has become an American Imperative as our nation moves forward in the twenty-first century. The narratives from these participants support the need for positive educational experiences and healthy academic identities as necessary and essential when trying to enhance full, optimal development of our young African American students within the context of school so that they may become productive members of a democratic society.

In Chapter V, I analyzed the narratives of the sixteen African American students who participated in this study and the interpretations regarding their experiences and

identity development within the context of school. I explored these narratives attending to patterns, parallel experiences, and common “voice” from the group. The result of this process is the formation of six themes that merged together direct quotes, researcher notes and scholarly literature.

In this chapter I addressed the research questions that guided this study regarding educational experience, academic identity, and achievement. Then I identified the strengths and limitations of the study something most researchers feel is the hallmark of good qualitative research. Finally, I concluded this chapter by providing implications for further research, coupled with recommendations for leading and teaching.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself?

Probes

As a person?

Outside of school?

As a student?

Inside of school?

Tell me about your experience as an African American student growing up through school?

Probes

Elementary School?

Middle School?

High School?

Tell me about your academic identity?

Probes

Influential Moment?

Influential Person?

Perception of school?

Achievement?

Academic ability?

APPENDIX B

Chunking List

F	Family
F-SM	Family Supportive Mom
F-SD	Family Supportive Dad
F-SFK	Family Supportive Fictive Kin
F-PA	Family Positive Association
F-NA	Family Negative Association
F-II	Family Influence on Identity
T	Teachers
T-C	Teachers Caring
T-PSC	Teachers Part of School Culture
T-SF	Teachers Surrogate Family
T-P	Teachers Personality
T-IPL	Teachers Interests in Personal Life
T-II	Teachers Influence on Identity
C	Culture
C-T	Culture Teachers Part of
C-II	Culture Influencing Identity
C-HE	Culture High Expectations
C-LE	Culture Low Expectations
C-D	Culture Diversity in School
AI	Academic Identity
AI-PC	Academic Identity Plans for College
AI-PCFS	Academic Identity Plans for College Financial Stability
AI-PCI	Academic Identity Plans for College Independence
AI-PCFC	Academic Identity Plans for College Future Career
AI-F	Academic Identity Family
AI-TE	Academic Identity Teacher Effect
AI-SE	Academic Identity School Environment
S	School
S-DP	School Definition or Purpose
S-N	School as a Necessity
S-BF	School Needed for Better Future

APPENDIX C

Participant Profile

Name	Gender	Attended Horace Mann Feeder Elementary School	Attended Horace Mann Feeder Middle School	School Setting for Majority of Educational Experiences
Jazmine	Female	No	No	Urban
Jalynn	Female	Yes	Yes	Urban
Christina	Female	No	No	Rural
Monica	Female	No	Yes	Urban
Sable	Female	No	No	Rural
Lela	Female	Yes	Yes	Urban
Melanie	Female	Yes	Yes	Rural
Bailey	Female	No	No	Urban
Javon	Male	No	No	Private
Gerran	Male	No	No	Urban
Andre	Male	No	Yes	Rural
Da-Juan	Male	No	No	Urban
Dallen	Male	No	No	Rural
Winton	Male	No	No	Urban
Odell	Male	No	No	Urban
Dashane	Male	No	No	Urban